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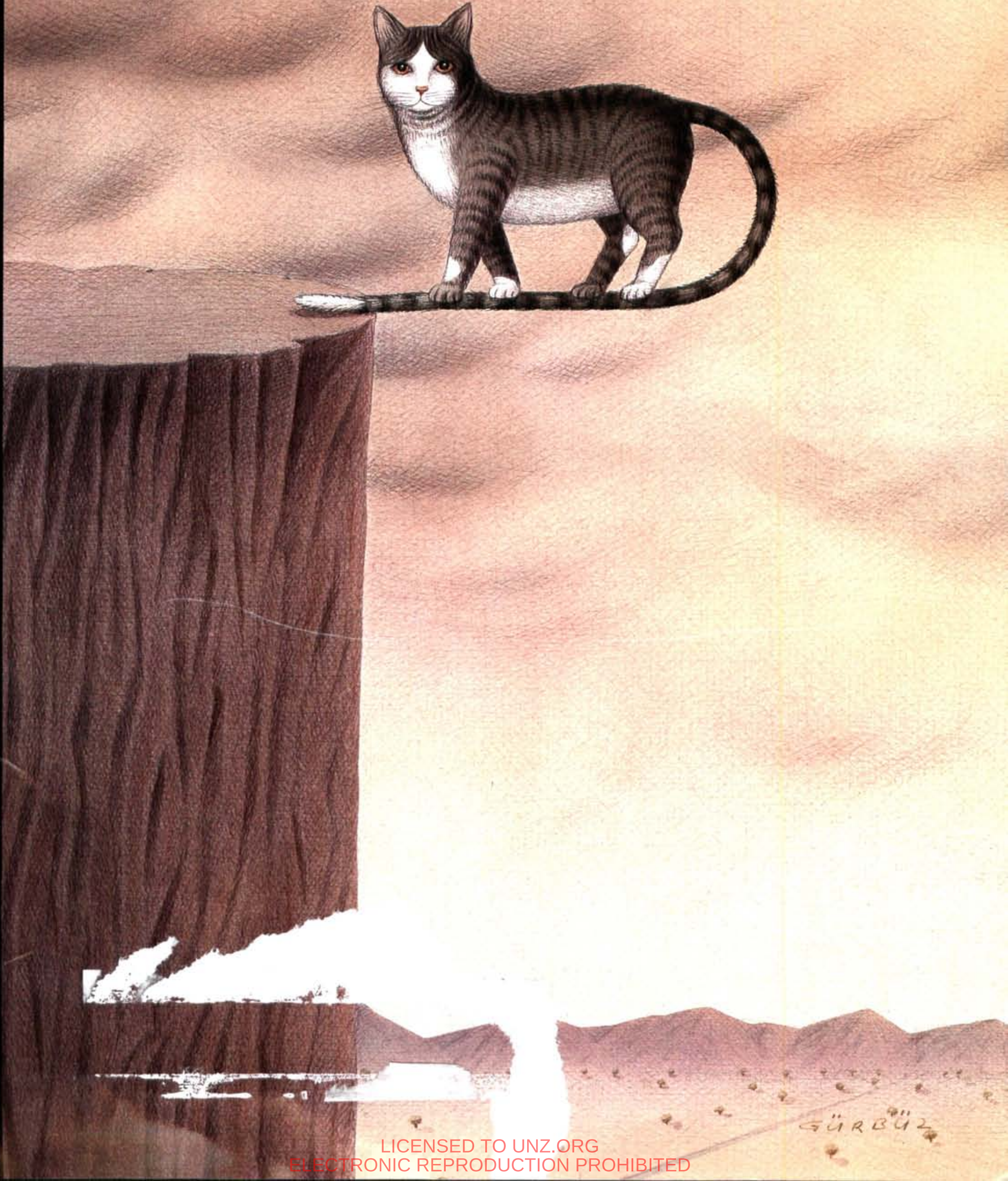
THE NEW YORKER

OCT. 5, 2009



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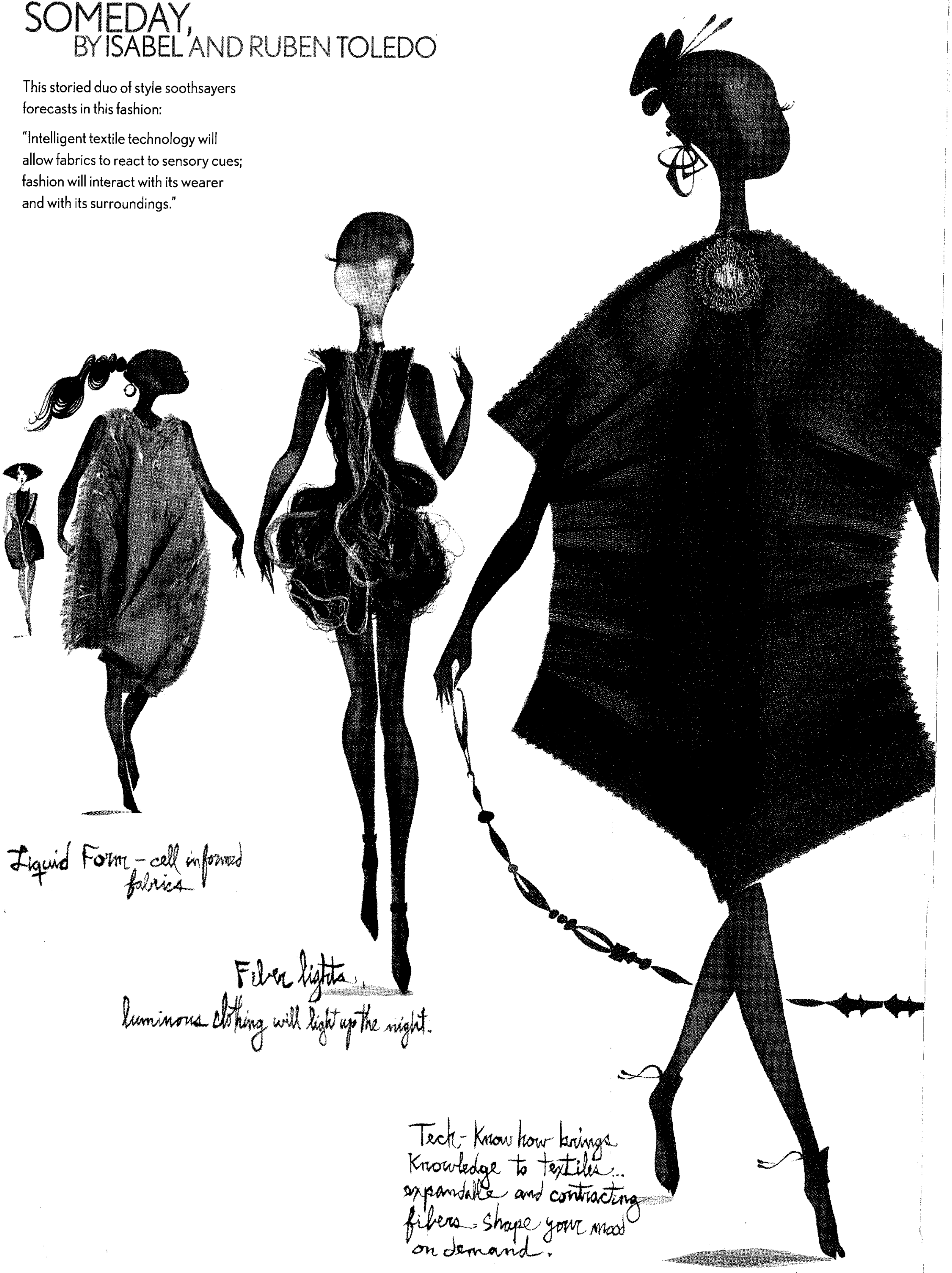

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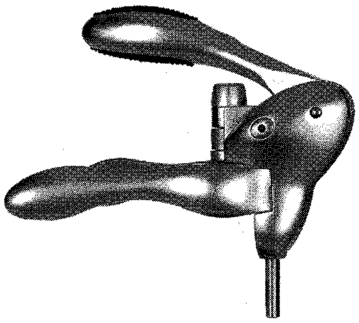

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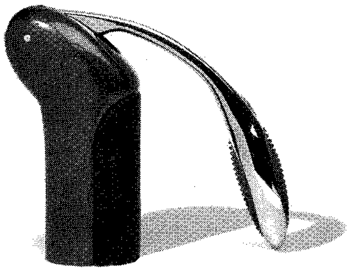

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THE NEW YORKER

OCTOBER 5, 2009

6 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
23 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Elizabeth Kolbert on Obama and global warming; Albright's pins; Clive Owen.

John Cassidy 30 ANNALS OF ECONOMICS
Rational Irrationality
Why markets fail.

Zev Borow 36 SHOUTS & MURMURS
Spousal Support

38 LETTER FROM TEHRAN
Veiled Threat
Iranian women protest the government.

Jon Lee Anderson 46 A REPORTER AT LARGE
Gangland
Life in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

Robert Polidori 58 SHOWCASE
The United Nations.

Anthony Lane 60 A CRITIC AT LARGE
Happy Haneke
A director's meditations on violence.

George Saunders 68 FICTION
"Victory Lap"

THE CRITICS

Nancy Franklin 76 ON TELEVISION
"The Jay Leno Show."

BOOKS

79 Briefly Noted
James Wood 80 *Richard Powers's "Generosity."*

Alex Ross 84 MUSICAL EVENTS
"Tosca" at the Met.

Hilton Als 86 THE THEATRE
"Othello."

David Denby 88 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"A Serious Man," "Capitalism: A Love Story."

POEMS

Lia Purpura 34 "First Leaf"
Charles Wright 49 "Heaven's Eel"

COVER *"On the Edge," by Gürbüz Doğan Ekşioğlu* DRAWINGS *Danny Shanahan, Paul Noth, Roz Chast, Tom Cheney, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Michael Maslin, Michael Crawford, Barbara Smaller, Farley Katz, Mick Stevens, David Sipress, William Haefeli, Bob Eckstein, Jack Ziegler, P. C. Vey, Zachary Kanin* SPOTS *Anders Wenngren*

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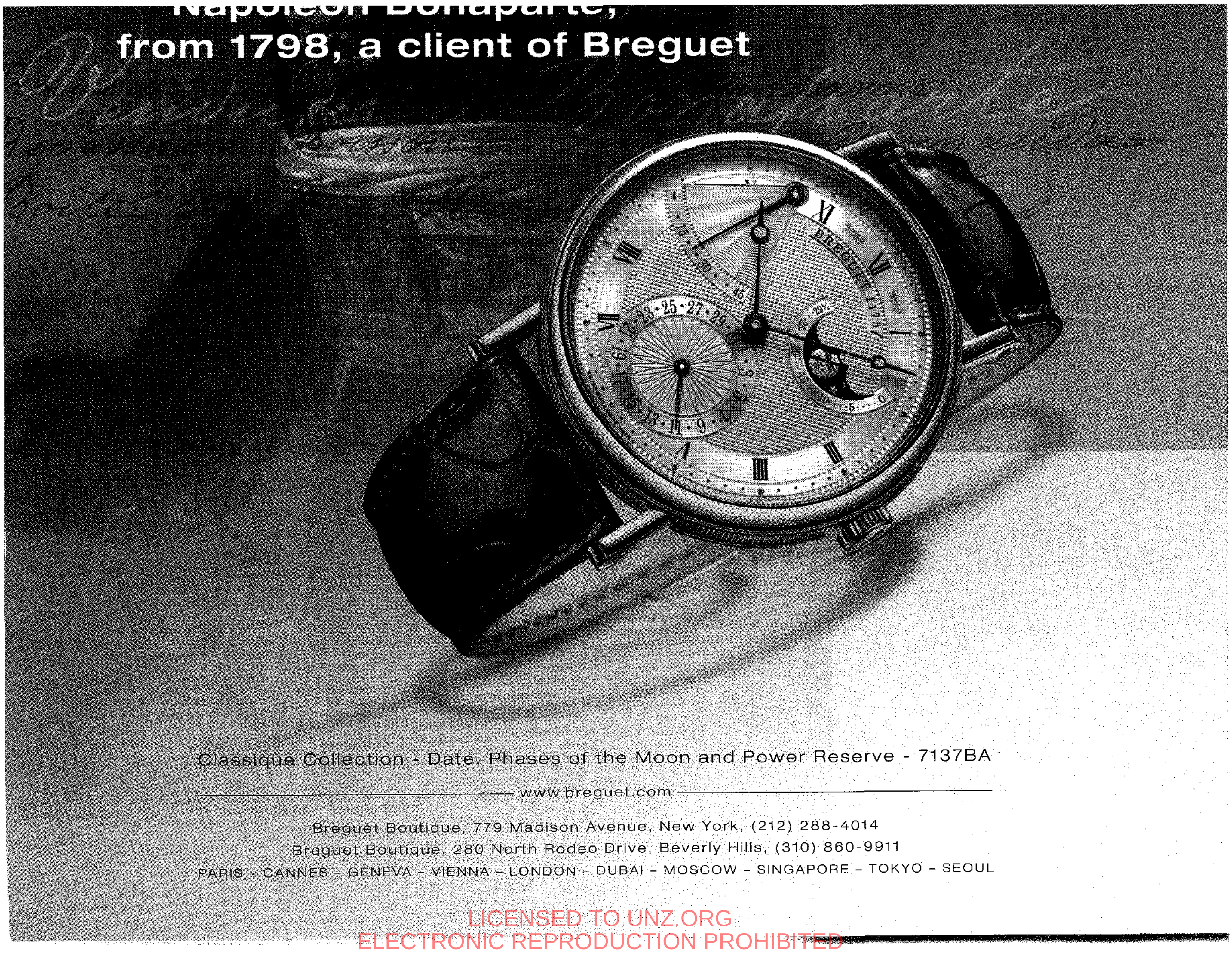
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Simon Schama
Obama and History

James Surowiecki
Tomorrow Never Comes:
Why We Procrastinate and
How It Matters

For more information, visit **newyorker.com/festival**.

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CONTRIBUTORS

John Cassidy ("Rational Irrationality," p. 30) is a staff writer and the author of "Dot.Con" and "How Markets Fail: The Logic of Economic Calamities," which will be published in November.

Elizabeth Kolbert (Comment, p. 23) reports frequently on environmental issues. She is the author of "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change."

Ben McGrath (The Talk of the Town, p. 25) is a staff writer.

Lia Purpura (Poem, p. 34), a poet and an essayist, published her third book of poems, "King Baby," last year. She lives in Baltimore.

Zev Borow (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 36) writes for film and television.

Gürbüz Doğan Ekşioğlu (Cover), a Turkish-born artist whose work has been published worldwide, is currently an assistant associate professor at the Yeditepe University Faculty of Fine Arts, in Istanbul. This is his sixth cover for the magazine.

Robert Polidori (Showcase, p. 58) has a new book, "Parcours Muséologique Revisité," twenty-six years of photography at Versailles, coming out next month.

Jon Lee Anderson ("Gangland," p. 46) has published several books, including "Guerrillas: Journeys in the Insurgent World" and "Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life," a revised edition of which comes out on October 6th.

Charles Wright (Poem, p. 49) received the 1998 Pulitzer Prize in poetry for "Black Zodiac." His latest collection, "Sestets," is due out in paperback in February. He teaches at the University of Virginia.

Anthony Lane ("Happy Haneke," p. 60), a film critic for the magazine, is the author of "Nobody's Perfect: Writings from *The New Yorker*."

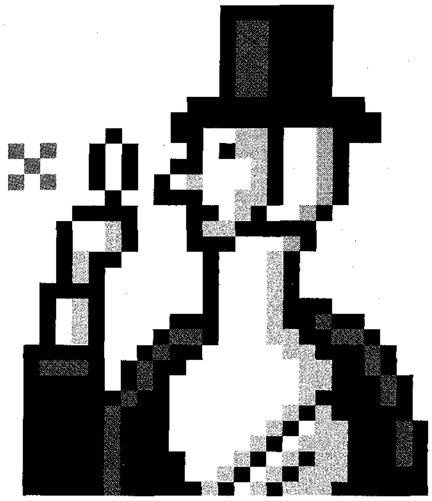
George Saunders (Fiction, p. 68) has written six books, including "The Braindead Megaphone," a collection of essays.

James Wood (Books, p. 80) is Professor of the Practice of Literary Criticism at Harvard. His book "How Fiction Works" is available in paperback.

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 84) writes about music for the magazine. His book "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century" won a National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

John Cassidy launches a new economics blog and chats live with readers. / Video: *James Surowiecki* interviews Joseph Stiglitz. / *Jon Lee Anderson* narrates a slide show about the gangs of Rio, with photographs by *João Pina*. / A *Robert Polidori* portfolio of photographs of U.N. headquarters. / Video: *Jorge Colombo's* Finger Painting. / Slide show: Madeleine Albright's pins. / Audio: The Political Scene podcast, hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden*. / Blogs: *Evan Osnos* on China, *Macy Halford* on books, the Cartoon Lounge, and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.



THE MAIL

DOING MORE

I was relieved to read Elizabeth Kolbert's debunking of the personal environmentalism expounded in various books and blogs (A Critic at Large, August 31st). However, worrying about using a tissue so as not to produce trash, as Colin Beavan does, is a moot point when you have a decent composting system, either in your back yard or run by a municipality. Composting is magic: not only does it transform an entire class of waste into something valuable (rich soil); it consolidates and reduces the volume. Squeamishness can be unlearned and varmints avoided; the marvel of reducing something to nothing is worth every worm and rotting avocado skin. Put a bin on the fire escape and use the elevator.
Josie Iselin
San Francisco, Calif.

I take issue with Kolbert's lumping my carbon-reduction project, detailed in my book, "Farewell, My Subaru," with eco-stunts hatched over lunch meetings with literary agents. I am now in the third year of my sustainability effort, and the endeavor is more than part of my literary and journalistic work; it is how I live my life. So much so that I am rearing my son largely on our ranch-raised goat milk, chicken eggs, and garden food (plus as much regional sustenance as possible). Between this, solar power, and vegetable-oil gas, I estimate that I use eighty per cent less fossil fuel than I did when I was growing up in the suburbs. The enormously complex issues of worldwide energy use, climate change, and population are, of course, worth intense discussion (we need much more of it, and fast), and I don't claim to be personally saving the world. But I consider my effort here on my ranch a legitimate starting point.
Doug Fine
Grant County, N.M.

The books discussed by Kolbert, in spite of their triviality, serve a useful purpose: they make it clear that most of the measures to stave off environmental collapse that are being pressed on us will turn out to be ineffective. We can reduce our consumption by a little, but this won't do much. As the global population grows, all human activities will make greater, and unsustainable, demands on planetary resources. According to a United Nations report, the amount of arable land per person in developing countries has decreased from about one-third of a hectare per capita in 1961 to one-fifth of a hectare in 1992 and will decline to one-tenth of a hectare by 2050 as population increases. Failure to do something about population dooms our descendants to living conditions that we can scarcely imagine.
Michael Jorrin
Ridgefield, Conn.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

James Wood, in his engaging review essay of Terry Eagleton's "Reason, Faith, and Revolution," deftly jabs the "new atheists" for fighting a God who seems to be "the hybrid of a cheaply understood Old Testament [and] a prejudicially scanned Koran" (Books, August 31st). However, when Wood later accuses the theologian Karl Barth's God of being "slightly chilly and unapproachable" he is guilty of the same prejudicial scanning. True, Barth began his work by forcefully burning away the stubble of the nineteenth-century conceit of an all too cozy God, who was, Barth said, really only "man" shouted in a loud voice. But this firestorm was a necessary prelude to the discovery of the God who, in absolute freedom, comes to humanity in grace and love—a God, Barth said, who responds to all forms of human enmity not with thunderbolts of wrath but with unexpected friendship.
Thomas G. Long
Professor, Candler School of Theology
Emory University
Atlanta, Ga.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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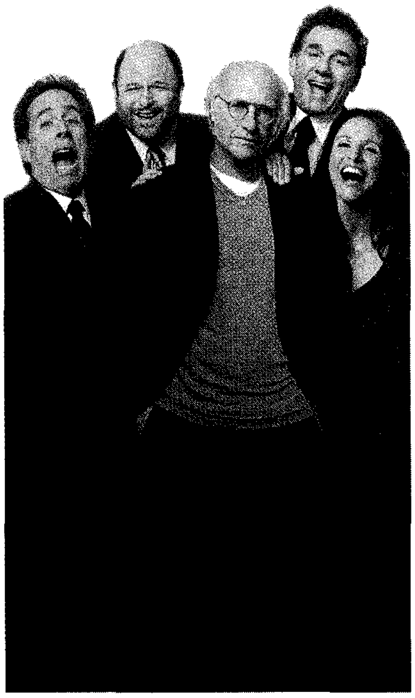

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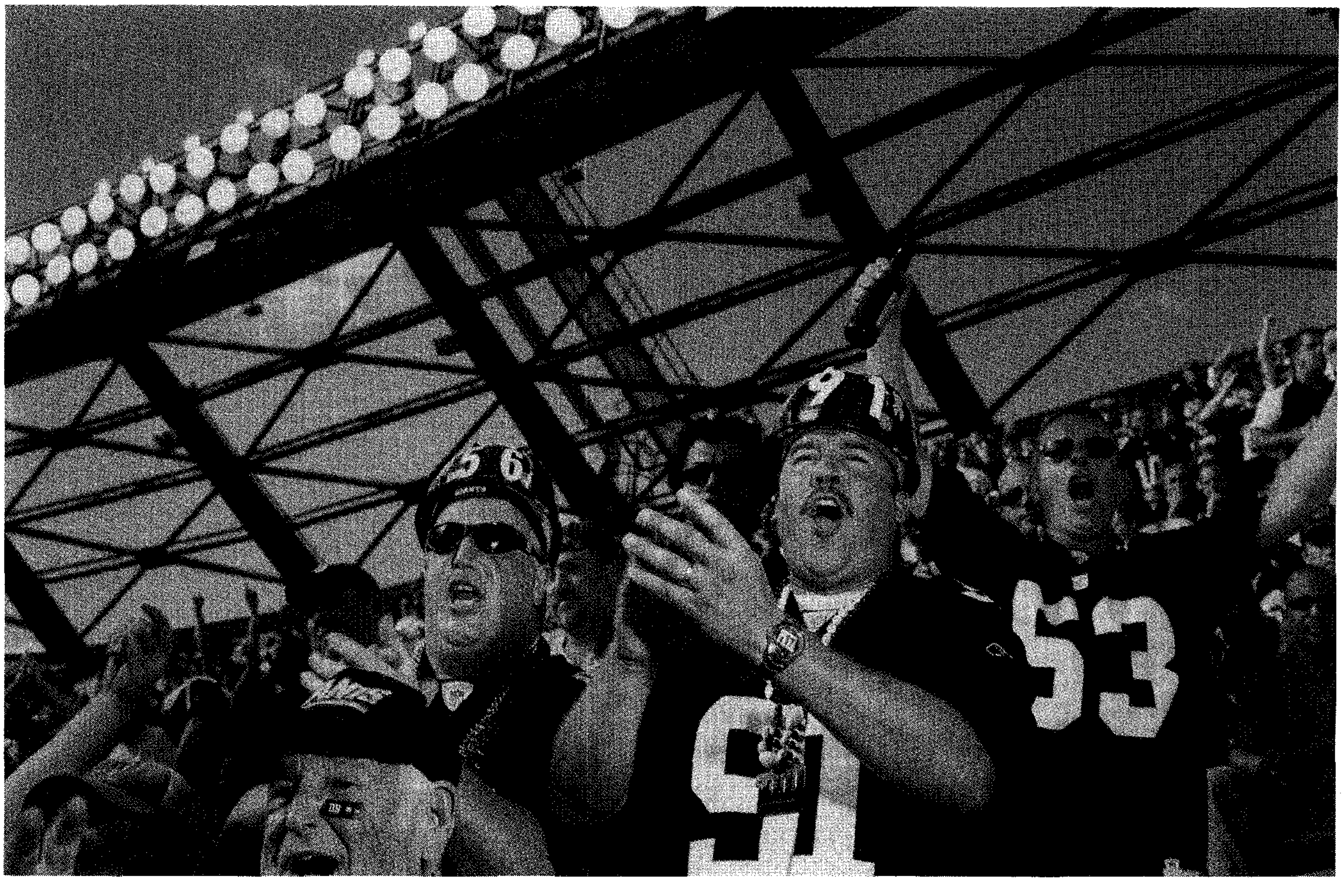

New York Giants fans at Giants Stadium. Photograph by Brian Finke.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
4	5	6	30	1	2	3

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
MONUMENTAL SHOW

The stride-piano giant James Price Johnson, who helped lay the foundation for modern jazz piano, wrote "The Charleston" and taught Fats Waller how to play. Duke Ellington learned from Johnson's piano rolls by playing them at half speed. Johnson died in 1955, and his body lies in an unmarked grave in Queens. A group of pianists, including Dick Hyman and Ethan Iverson, are performing at Smalls to raise money for a proper headstone. (See page 11.)

ART
FASHION SENSE

The International Center of Photography caps off its yearlong celebration of fashion with "Dress Codes: The Third ICP Triennial of Photography and Video," an exhibition of more than a hundred pieces, from Cindy Sherman's portraits of fashionistas to Nathalie Djurberg's stop-motion animations. (See page 12.)

DANCE
THINGS FALL APART

The Australian choreographer Lucy Guerin, a bright new talent in New York in the nineties, is now an established leader back home. Her "Structure and Sadness," at Dance Theatre Workshop, takes the 1970 collapse of a Melbourne bridge as the starting point for a performance of construction, collapse, and grief. (See page 13.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ANCIENT EVENINGS

Sonja Frisell's production of "Aida," with its towering sets and cast of hundreds, defines grand opera at the Met. It returns this week with Violeta Urmana, Dolora Zajik, and Johan Botha in the leading roles. (See page 14.)

MOVIES
THE FRONT LINES

The New York Film Festival's sidebar "Views from the Avant-Garde" packs a weekend with eleven programs that include "La Rabbia di Pasolini," a feature-length reconstruction of Pier Paolo Pasolini's film essay from 1963, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's "A Letter to Uncle Boonmee," set in rural Thailand, and "Untitled," a surrealistic short film by Norman Mailer, from 1947. (See page 19.)

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"Downtown 81," starring Jean-Michel Basquiat, screens at MOMA Oct. 2.

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AFTER MISS JULIE
Sienna Miller stars in Patrick Marber's adaptation of Strindberg's play from 1888, about an upper-class girl who preys on a servant at her father's country estate. Marin Ireland and Jonny Lee Miller also star; Mark Brokaw directs. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE ARCHERY CONTEST
Hotel Savant and the writer-director John Jahnke present this play, which explores the sexual boundaries in marriage. Opens Oct. 2. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

BROKE-OLOGY
In Nathan Louis Jackson's new play, a young man leaves college in Connecticut to return to his Kansas home, where his brother still lives, to care for his sick father. Thomas Kail directs the Lincoln Center Theatre production. In previews. Opens Oct. 5. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

BYE BYE BIRDIE
John Stamos, Gina Gershon, Nolan Gerard Funk, Jayne Houdyshell, and Bill Irwin star in the 1960 musical, directed and choreographed by Robert Longbottom, about a fifties-era teen idol. With a book by Michael Stewart, lyrics by Lee Adams, and music by Charles Strouse. The Roundabout production opens the new Henry Miller's Theatre. In previews. (124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION
Sam Gold directs a new comedy by Annie Baker, about the dynamics among five people in a community drama class in New England. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

COUNTY OF KINGS
Lemon Andersen wrote and performs a one-man show, about his coming-of-age in Brooklyn during the birth of hip-hop. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

EYE OF GOD
Tim Blake Nelson wrote this drama, directed by Lisa Devine, about a woman who falls in love with a religious fanatic in a small Oklahoma town. Previews begin Oct. 2. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

HAMLET
Jude Law stars in the Donmar Warehouse production, which originated in London's West End. Michael Grandage directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 6. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

HOW TO BE A GOOD ITALIAN DAUGHTER
Antoinette LaVecchia wrote and stars in this autobiographical one-woman show, an account of her relationship with her mother. Previews begin Oct. 3. (Cherry Lane Studio, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

IMELDA, A NEW MUSICAL
Pan Asian Repertory Theatre presents a new musical, with a book by Sachi Oyama, music by Nathan Wang, and lyrics by Aaron Coleman, about Imelda Marcos, her influence on the Philippines, and its impact on world politics. Tim Dang directs. Opens Sept. 30. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

LET ME DOWN EASY
In her latest one-woman show, Anna Deavere Smith channels subjects she interviewed about the resilience of the human body. Directed by Leonard Foglia. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

LIPSYNCH
The Canadian director Robert Lepage presents an eight-and-a-half-hour drama that follows nine characters as they search for meaning over the course of several decades. The play can be viewed in three parts or in a marathon performance. Opens Oct. 3. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE
Nora Ephron and Delia Ephron wrote this collection of vignettes, based on the book by Ilene Beckerman, performed by a rotating cast that includes Samantha Bee, Kristin Chenoweth, Tyne Daly, Katie Finneran, Rosie O'Donnell, Mary Louise Wilson, Rhea Perlman, and Rita Wilson. Karen Carpenter directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 1. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

MEMPHIS
Joe DiPietro wrote the book and lyrics and David Bryan wrote the music and lyrics for this new musical, about the birth of rock and roll. Christopher Ashley directs. In previews. (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE NEIL SIMON PLAYS: BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS
David Cromer directs Simon's 1983 play, starring Laurie Metcalf and Dennis Boutsikaris. Previews begin Oct. 2. (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.)

THE NIGHT WATCHER
Primary Stages presents a monologue written and performed by Charlayne Woodard, about her experiences as a woman who has no children of her own but mentors many. Daniel Sullivan directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 6. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE OLDSMOBILES
Roger Rosenblatt wrote this one-act play, in which a middle-aged couple has an existential crisis. Previews begin Oct. 1. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

OLEANNA
Bill Pullman and Julia Stiles star in David Mamet's drama, about a power struggle between a male professor and a female student. Doug Hughes directs. In previews. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

ORDINARY DAYS
Roundabout Underground presents a new musical by Adam Gwon, directed by Marc Bruni, about the intertwining lives of four New Yorkers. Previews begin Oct. 2. (111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD
The Pearl Theatre Company kicks off its season, and its new residency at City Center's Stage II, with the comedy by J. M. Synge. J. R. Sullivan directs. Previews begin Oct. 2. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE ROYAL FAMILY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents the 1927 comedy by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, about the idiosyncrasies of a family of stage actors. The cast includes Ana Gasteyer, Larry Pine, Tony Roberts, John Glover, Rosemary Harris, Jan Maxwell, and Reg Rogers. Doug Hughes directs. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE SEAGULL
National Asian American Theatre Company presents Chekhov's tragedy, in a translation by Paul Schmidt, performed by an Asian-American cast. Gia Forakis directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 1. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 212-352-3101.)

STILL LIFE
Will Frears directs Alexander Dinelaris's play, about a photographer whose sudden avoidance of her craft and subsequent despair are disrupted by an unlikely romance. An MCC Theatre production, starring Dominic Chianese, Adriane Lenox, Sarah Paulson, Halley Feiffer, and Frederick Weller. In previews. Opens Oct. 5. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SUPERIOR DONUTS
Michael McKean stars in the latest play by Tracy Letts, about a white ex-hippie who owns a run-down doughnut shop in a changing Chicago neigh-

borhood, and who employs a black teen-ager who tries to improve the place. Tina Landau directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 1. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TWO UNRELATED PLAYS BY DAVID MAMET
At Atlantic Theatre Company, Neil Pepe directs "Keep Your Pantheon" and "School." Opens Sept. 30. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

VIGIL
Morris Panych wrote this dark comedy, about a lowly bank worker tending to his wealthy elderly aunt. Stephen Dimenna directs. Opens Sept. 30. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

WISHFUL DRINKING
Carrie Fisher performs her solo autobiographical show, about her drinking, addiction, and depression in Hollywood. Tony Taccone directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 4. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

NOW PLAYING

A BOY AND HIS SOUL
Colman Domingo's loving tribute to his childhood and to his family's boisterous, music-filled home in West Philadelphia—their "bump and hustle palace"—has just a whisper of narrative but ample entertainment value, thanks to Domingo's joy, passion, warmth, and wit. Domingo ("Passing Strange"), accompanied by a soundtrack of the soul music he adores, plays himself and all of his family members, snapping from character to character in a flurry of vocal inflections and dance moves. He's not afraid to make fun of himself—"My parents were selling the only home I ever knew, and that was wearing me *out!*"—or to get serious, even while dancing to "Betcha by Golly, Wow." The final scenes lack the specificity and the vigor of the rest of the show, but Domingo's fine performance tells us all we need to know about the fate of the boy and his soul. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

IN THE DAYLIGHT
Marty Feingold (Joseph Urla), an alcoholic, misanthropic writer of popular books, blames the death of his innocent father on his mother's philandering, which is why he hasn't been home to suburban New Jersey in six years. He's here now, though, because he thinks his mother (Concetta Tomei) is dying, and she and Marty's sister (Sharon Maguire) have summoned him home to talk about a Very Serious Family Problem, which gets more serious when an unexpected stranger (Ashley Austin Morris) arrives. There's not much to this dark comedy—about a family that looks bad on the surface but is, in fact, much, much worse—besides its sometimes very nasty, funny dialogue. The emotionally overwrought tone works well at times, but the playwright, Tony Glazer, often seems to be having more fun than the audience is. The set and lighting are stupendous, though, and the actors, directed by John Gould Rubin, are all pros. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

KILLERS AND OTHER FAMILY
Lizzie (Samantha Soule) is finishing up her dissertation in her New York apartment when someone knocks at the door. It's her brother (Dashiell Eaves) and his friend Danny (Shane McRae), a traumatic figure from Lizzie's youth who is now running from the law. The playwright Lucy Thurber writes often about rural Massachusetts, which functions here as an offstage nightmare realm, sickened by poverty and sexual violence. During the play's taut and often terrifying eighty-five minutes, the past comes back to disturb Lizzie's new life, which she shares with her girlfriend (the improbably funny Aya Cash). Expertly directed by Caitriona McLaughlin, the play is a harrowing realization of a common fear: the impossibility of escaping one's roots. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

OTHELLO
John Ortiz and Philip Seymour Hoffman star in the Shakespeare tragedy, directed by Peter Sellars, in a Public Theatre/LAByrinth production.

TABLES FOR TWO
THE BROOKLYN STAR

ELIZA HONEY

33 Havemeyer St. (718-599-9899)—In 2004, an out-of-work cook from Santa Fe named Joaquin Baca, tired of sleeping on his sister's couch in the West Village, applied, through Monster.com, to be the deputy to a nobody chef—the No. 2 in a two-man operation. Thus began the rise of the Momofuku Dynasty, with Baca and the much-extolled David Chang sweating it out in their six-hundred-square-foot noodle bar. Last spring, Baca gambled again: his first solo endeavor. Not surprisingly, the result, the Brooklyn Star, is bathed in a thick we'll-remember-this-when vibe. The space sits in the middle of a ghostly Williamsburg strip, without a competing commercial enterprise in eyeshot; a street sign out front dangles upside down from its pole. The difference, of course, is that Baca is now a name, and, on a certain level, he's showing off: I will cook in the boonies, and you will come and eat. Indeed, a decent crowd, if not the hordes foodies predicted, settles into the built-in booths each night, hungry for Baca's nouveau Southern comfort food—that is, square meals for the hipster set.

One might question the bacon lobby's influence on Baca. A waiter, dressed in a plaid shirt and bolo tie, advocates that you add bacon to an otherwise perfect skillet of corn bread. A wedge of iceberg lettuce is drizzled with bacon-buttermilk dressing. The topnotch half chicken is served with peaches, pea shoots, and bacon. The mac and cheese is bacon-flecked (a pleasant dash of salt and smoke amid all that goo). Even the meat in the hot meatloaf sandwich comes wrapped in, yes, bacon. (There are impending plans to serve brunch, and one can only imagine the monumental role bacon will play there.) But do not fear: many avenues exist to fulfill your other-white-meat quota. Baca fries pig tails, and adds braised pig leg to his collard greens. He marinates fun-size ribs in Dr. Pepper before slathering them with his own barbecue vinaigrette—a similar sauce is found, misguidedly, atop the oysters. If you are a vegetarian, the Brooklyn Star offers only side dishes, like okra, creamed corn, and mashed potatoes. (If you're a flamboyant carnivore, there's a twenty-eight-ounce T-bone.) A liquor license has yet to be secured, but occasionally there are fruity concoctions such as watermelon juice infused with blackberries. As with a quality milkshake, chunks of it get stuck in your straw. The drink is enviously creative and over-the-top delicious—alone, enough to keep Baca off his sister's sofa. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $14-$21.)

—*Mike Peed*

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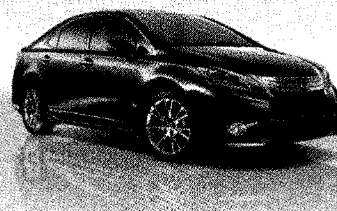

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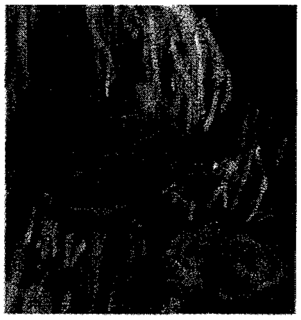
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
WATER WORLD



CLAUDE MONET, "WATER LILIES" (1914-1926) DETAIL, IMAGE © THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Correcting a terrible post-renovation mistake, MOMA has reinstalled Claude Monet's "Water Lilies," a nearly forty-two-foot-long triptych, along with related paintings, in a room of its wondrous own, with a couch. Bring a snorkel. Dry paint never made for wetter effects than in the engulfing expositions of the Giverny ponds and gardens, which filled the last years of the artist, as he adjusted to the handicap of cataracts. (He died in 1926.) Get as close as you like to the nubbly surfaces of the triptych, with its candid brushstrokes that skitter and clot; your gaze will stay drenched in an aqueous sublime. Pinkish summer clouds aren't so much reflected as drowned in turquoise, violet, and mud-green depths. Monet knew palpably, at each point, what all his colors were up to. Everything answers, resoundingly, to everything else. The tone of the next biggest, single-panel panorama is a soprano, silvery shimmer, suggesting water less than polychrome steam. Smaller canvases include "The Japanese Footbridge"—with its startling reds—and a moist fury of flowering agapanthus. Last one in's a rotten egg.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

(Reviewed in this issue.) (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-967-7555. Through Oct. 4.)

A STEADY RAIN

Hugh Jackman and Daniel Craig star in a new drama by Keith Huff, about a pair of Chicago cops whose friendship is tested on the job. John Crowley directs. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

AFTERMATH: New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **I GOT SICK THEN I GOT BETTER:** New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100. **IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?:** Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **THE PIED PIPERS OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE:** Theatre 80 St. Marks, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-352-3101. Through Oct. 5. **THE PRIDE OF PARNELL STREET:** 59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Oct. 4. **THE PROVENANCE OF BEAUTY:** Bus leaves from the Elmendorf Reformed Church, at 171 E. 121st St., between Lexington and Third Aves. For reservations, which are required, call 866-811-4111. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TOXIC AVENGER:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Sept. 30: A night of the blues, with the powerhouse vocalist **Shemekia Copeland.** With **Rick Estrin & the Nightcats** (formerly Little Charlie & the Nightcats).

THE BELL HOUSE

149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—Oct. 3: **Christina Courtin,** who turns vocal cartwheels while belting out jazz-inflected rock, blues, and folk.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 3-5: The singer **Lucinda Williams** celebrates thirty years in the business with a career retrospective. The first set of each night is devoted to a specific time period; the second set is more open. On Oct. 3, the program starts with songs recorded from 1979 to 1989, when she released "Ramblin'," "Happy Woman Blues," and "Lucinda Williams." On Oct. 4, Williams kicks things off with material from 1992 to 2001, a particularly fertile period for her ("Sweet Old World," "Car Wheels on a Gravel Road," "Essence"). On Oct. 5, she delves into the more recent albums "World Without Tears," "West," and "Little Honey."

HIRO BALLROOM

371 W. 16th St. (800-745-3000)—Olivia B. Merilahti, a Finnish vocalist and guitarist who sings in English, and the French composer and multi-instrumentalist Dan Levy are the sensational pop act the **Dø.** The name is pronounced "doe," as in "do re mi," and their music is cinematic in scope. A cross between the Cardigans and Hole, with peaks of orchestral whimsy, it's an exuberantly bouncy sound. Their first U.S. tour wraps up here on Oct. 3.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Oct. 2: **Andrew W.K.** first made an impact on the pop world at the dawn of this decade with his major-label début, "I Get Wet," the cover of which features a picture of him with a bloody nose. The album's speed-metal-like party anthems are full of catchy pop hooks, and W.K. attracted a testosterone-heavy fan base. Since then, he's become a producer, a motivational speaker, and a night-life impresario (he's one of the folks behind the club Santos Party House). Continuing his creative efflorescence, he recently released "55 Cadillac," an album of solo piano improvisations (he's an accomplished player) that were inspired by his 1955 Cadillac Fleetwood Limousine. Here, he's playing with the **Calder Quartet,** a chamber-music ensemble. It may sound like a strange combination, but W.K. has been known to make it work before.

THE MARKET HOTEL

1142 Myrtle Ave., at Broadway, Brooklyn (No phone)—Oct. 1: At the forefront of the current Brooklyn hardcore revival is the muscular three-piece **Drunkdriver,** who deliver punishing blasts of discordant punk rock. Their technical mastery is nearly obscured by the destruction they wreak on their instruments; a particular highlight is the drummer, Jeremy Villalobos, who pummels his trap set into submission with astonishing energy.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Oct 1: Taking their name from Oliver Cromwell's notoriously puritanical brigade, **New Model Army** rose from the smoldering pyre of British punk in the early eighties, playing a scathing blend of apocalyptic agitprop laced with elements of acoustic folk rock. Oct. 4: Ian Svenonius's reputation as an enfant terrible of contemporary rock and roll continues to grow with his new project, **Chain and the Gang.** As the leader of classic D.C. acts like Nation of Ulysses and in his other projects he's always had a strong tongue-in-cheek, anti-authoritarian approach. His latest band preaches a hilarious anti-freedom gospel (the new record is called "Down with Liberty . . . Up with Chains!") that's a finger-snapping exploration of his frustration with the vacuity of pop culture.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG

66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Oct. 1-3: WFMU, the local long-running free-form radio station that's a favorite of obscure-music aficionados and vinyl collectors, is hosting a three-day festival featuring an assortment of new, old, and almost forgotten bands. The Kraut-rock pioneers **Faust** headline the first night, with Philadelphia's **Cold Cave** opening the show. Day two features another Pennsylvania act, **Pissed Jeans,** who produce pounding hardcore. The final night is headlined by New York's classic no-wave favorites **Teenage Jesus and the Jerks**—who emerged last year for the first time since Carter appeared on television in a cardigan—with Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore as their bassist. With **Drunkdriver** (see the Market Hotel).

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE

Broadway at 44th St. (800-745-3000)—Oct. 2: Blending the bluster of hard rock with arena-friendly choruses, **Foreigner** was a hit-making force in the seventies and eighties. The band's music is still a classic-rock-radio staple, although only one founding member of the group, Mick Jones (not to be confused with the Clash guitarist of the same name), remains.

SILENT BARN

915 Wyckoff Ave., Ridgewood, Queens (No phone)—Oct. 2-3: **Cheap Time,** a garage-punk trio that traffics in cocky, expertly crafted songs, pays a visit to this edgy outer-borough venue before leaving for a U.S. tour with Yo La Tengo.

SULLIVAN HALL

214 Sullivan St., between Bleecker and W. 3rd Sts. (212-634-0427)—Sept. 30 and Wednesdays through Oct. 21: **Chris Barron,** formerly of the Spin Doctors, holds court. Fridays Oct. 2-23: **Bonerama,** from New Orleans, brings its funky multi-trombone assault to town.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Oct. 3: The virtuosic Tehran native **Kayhan Kalhor,** whose mastery of the *kamancheh* (spike fiddle) and *setar* (a long-necked fretted lute) is unparalleled, delivers a set of improvisations inspired by current events in his homeland. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Oct. 24: **Karen Akers,** the doyenne of New York cabaret, performs the music of Cole Porter.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Sept. 30-Oct. 3: The **John Abercrombie** quartet. The group's new album, "Wait Till You See Her," is more proof that the guitarist Abercrombie has found musical soul mates in the violinist **Mark Feldman** and the drummer **Joey Baron.** The fine up-and-coming bassist **Thomas Morgan** rounds out the group.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Sept. 29-Oct. 4: Neither Miles Davis nor John Coltrane showed much interest in Latin jazz, but that hasn't stopped the trombonist **Conrad Herwig** from successfully filtering their work through the prism of Afro-Cuban rhythms and arrangements. The illustrious pianist **Eddie Palmieri,** Herwig's occasional employer, sits in.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Sept. 29-Oct. 8: **Judy Collins** has made a seamless transition from folk deity to cabaret icon. Her high artistry and disarming candor translate well to an intimate room.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Sept. 29-Oct. 4: The eclectically minded vocalist **Karrin Allyson.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Oct. 6-17: **Jane Krakowski,** a familiar face from television ("30 Rock") and Broadway, will bring additional lustre to this swank East Side nightspot.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Sept. 30: Coöperative bands made up of A-list players seem to be the rage these days. **Heaven on Earth,** whose eponymous début album has just been released, brings together the saxophonist **James Carter,** the keyboardist **John Medeski,** the bassist **Christian McBride,** the guitarist **Adam Rogers,** and the drummer **Matt Wilson.**

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 1-4: The unorthodox and dazzling jazz guitarist **Stanley Jordan.**

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Oct. 2-3: The Jamaican pianist **Monty Alexander** swings his way from Kingston to Harlem. (Allen Room, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 1-4: The seventh annual Festival of New Trumpet Music features noteworthy brass men like **Ambrose Akinmusire, Jeremy Pelt, Eddie Henderson, Avishai Cohen,** and **James Zollar.** The West Coast-based luminary **Bobby Bradford,** best known for his work with Ornette Coleman and John Carter, plays back-to-back nights with the saxophonist **David Murray.** Oct. 5: The **Mingus Orchestra** celebrates a year of Mondays devoted to the late bassist. Oct. 6: The inventive trumpeter **Cuong Vu** leads a quartet stocked with two bassists.

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—Oct. 4: **"James P. Johnson's Last Rent Party!"** This daylong event is a fund-raiser for the purchase of a headstone for the Maspeth, Queens, grave of the keyboard genius, who died in 1955. Doors open at 1; festivities start half an hour later, with a symposium on the pianist, who wrote "The Charleston" and other Jazz Age standards. The music starts at 3; a wide swath of exceptional pianists, including **Dick Hyman, Mike Lipskin, Terry Waldo, Spike Wilner,** and **Ethan Iverson** (of the Bad Plus), will perform.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Sept. 29-Oct. 4: Guitar aficionados familiar with the 1996 album "East Coast Love Affair" are aware of how deft **Kurt Rosenwinkel** can sound with just bass and drums behind him. His forthcoming album, "Kurt Rosenwinkel Standards Trio Vol. 1: Reflections," revisits that stripped-down setting. Here, he is joined by the bassist **Eric Revis** (who is on the album) and the drummer **Rodney Green** (who is not).

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Vermeer's Masterpiece 'The Milkmaid'"** sets an example for recession-era museum practice. The single guest diva, from the Rijksmuseum, in Amsterdam, heads a cast of local talent: the museum's own five Vermeers (including the later, peerless "Young Woman with Water Pitcher") and related works from the Dutch Golden Age. A husky young servant pours milk. The colors are sensational, the light effects miraculous. The curator, Walter Liedtke, proposes a sexy subtext: milkmaids were notoriously promiscuous. But the picture's quiet majesty hardly countenances aphrodisia. Vermeer suffused ordinary humanity with a conviction of the sacred. Through Nov. 29. ♦ **"Looking In: Robert Frank's 'The Americans.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Augustus Saint-Gaudens in the Metropolitan Museum of Art."** Through Nov. 15. ♦ **"Cinnabar: The Chinese Art of Carved Lacquer."** Through Feb. 21. ♦ **"Watteau, Music, and Theater."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

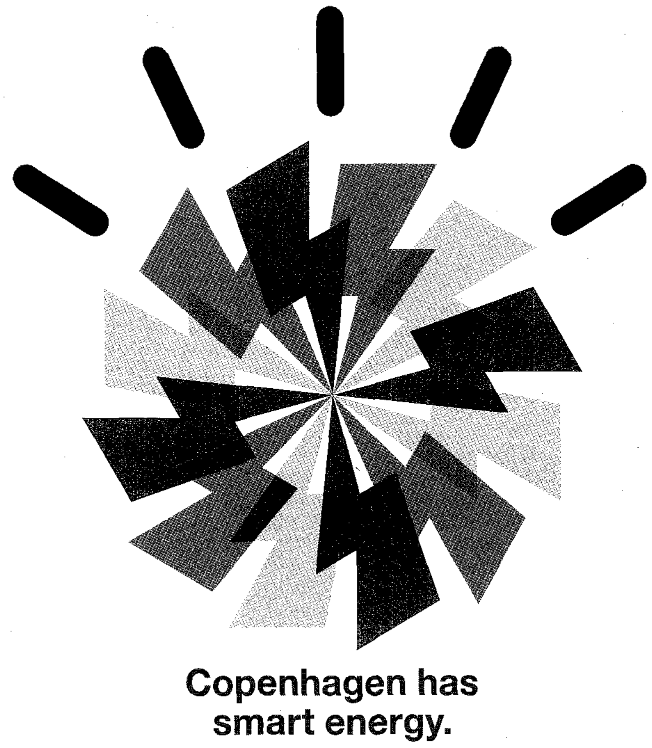
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Monet's Water Lilies."** Through April 12. ♦ **"In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976."** Through Oct. 5. ♦ **"Ron Arad: No Discipline."** Through Oct. 19. ♦ **"Paul Sietsema."** Opens Sept. 30. ♦ **"New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek."** Opens Sept. 30. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kandinsky."** It is a kind of apotheosis to see this retrospective in the Guggenheim, whose founding collection centered on this titanic artist, and whose architecture ratified his spirit of shoot-the-works modernity. Not for the first time, but with extra verve, the spiral ramp acts as a time machine, whirling us back into years when it seemed that paint on a brush could change the world. Best are the ferocious pictures from 1909 to 1914, in which Kandinsky invented and road-tested abstract art. The tidied-up modernistic ciphers and graphic doodads of his later work remain a harder sell, but the scope and scale of his ambition, even there, awe. He was really something. Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Gabriele Münter and Vasily Kandinsky, 1902-14: A Life in Photographs."** Through Jan. 13. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction."** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Steve Wolfe on Paper."** Opens Sept. 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Patricia Cronin: Harriet Hosmer, Lost and Found."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Reflections in the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time."** Through Jan. 3. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)



AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Thomas Chambers (1808-1869): American Marine and Landscape Painter."** Through March 7. ♦ **"Up Close: Henry Darger and the Coloring Book."** Opens Oct. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan."** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—**"Vito Acconci: Lobby-for-the-Time-Being."** Opens Oct. 5. ♦ **"Intersections: The Grand Concourse Commissions."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

DIA AT THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA
Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-926-2234)—**"Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: Chronotopes & Dioramas."** Through April 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 4:30, and Sundays 1-4.)

THE DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World."** Through Dec. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop."** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection."** Opens Oct. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

GREY ART GALLERY
100 Washington Sq. E. (212-998-6780)—**"Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya."** Through Dec. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6, Saturdays, 11 to 5, and Wednesday evenings until 8.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Dress Codes: The Third ICP Triennial of Photography and Video."** Opens Oct. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"Rite Now: Sacred and Secular in Video."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust."** Through Oct. 1. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"William Blake's World: 'A New Heaven Is Begun.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Celebrating Puccini."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Rococo and Revolution: Eighteenth-Century French Drawings."** Opens Oct. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Emory Douglas: Black Panther."** Through Oct. 18. ♦ **"Intersections Intersected: The Photography of David Goldblatt."** Through Oct. 11. ♦ **"Rigo 23: The Deeper They Bury Me, the Louder My Voice Becomes."** Through Oct. 21. ♦ **"Dorothy Iannone: Lioness."** Through Oct. 18. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"A Voyage of Growth and Discovery: Mike Kelley and Michael Smith."** Through Dec. 30. ♦ **"In Practice Fall 2009."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Hurvin Anderson."** Through Oct. 25. ♦ **"Artists in Residence: Khalif Kelly, Adam Pendleton, Dawit L. Petros."** Through Oct. 25. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

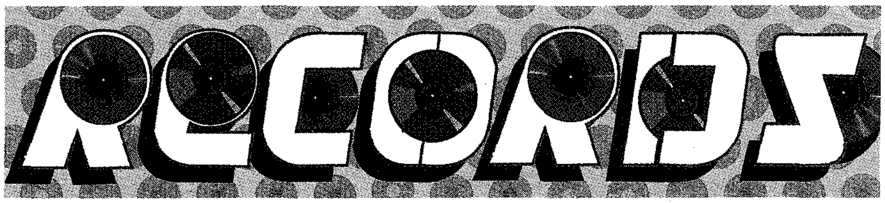
GALLERIES—UPTOWN

TIM DAVIS
Davis, one of the shrewdest young photographers around, took many of his best new pictures while in Italy during his Rome Prize fellowship year. But when he shows them alongside photographs made in China and in the U.S., in this exhibition titled "The New Antiquity," he scatters our attention too widely, as the scale jumps from huge to small and excellent pictures compete with others that are merely quirky. Still, there are images here that should not be missed, including a pair of bodacious Roman prostitutes, a graffiti-scarred wall painting, a gaggle of digital cameras displaying shots of the Colosseum, and a "Gypsy meal" of fried chicken and grapes spread out on a grimy mattress. Even when Davis stumbles, he scores. Through Oct. 24. (Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444.)

"POLAROIDS"
Now that the format is on the verge of extinction, Polaroids have been cropping up all over. Here, two artists and one collaborative team demonstrate their utility and expressive range. Diana Kingsley uses Polaroids primarily as preliminary studies for her brightly colored, oddly fraught still-lifes. Mike and Doug Starn use them to document completed projects and note potential subjects (clouds, snowflakes, globes), as well as to piece together unique works. Richard Pettibone, best known for his miniaturized appropriations of Pop and abstract art, re-photographs Diane Arbus, Helmut Newton, and Guy Bourdin from open books and magazines, then overlays some of the images with brightly painted bars, dots, and squiggles. The results are surprising—at once festive and fetishistic. Through Oct. 24. (Castelli, 18 E. 77th St. 212-249-4470.)

Short List

ALLAN KAPROW: Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970. Through Oct. 24. **MEL KENDRICK:** Madison Square Park, Madison Ave. at 25th St. 212-538-1884. Through Dec. 31. **MAYA LIN:** Salon 94, 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Through Nov. 13. **JEFF WALL:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Oct. 30.



STEVE POWERS

POP NOTES
WHEN YOU WISH UPON BIG STAR

Big Star's name, taken from a Southern supermarket chain, has primarily been read as an ironic commentary on celebrity, but in retrospect it seems like an astronomical warning. After the Memphis power-pop outfit, led by Chris Bell and Alex Chilton, released its début, "#1 Record," in 1972, it imploded repeatedly, each time producing a burst of light. First came "Radio City," the desperately jangly record the band made after Bell's departure; Chilton, the bassist Andy Hummel, and the drummer Jody Stephens fused the melodic genius of bands like the Beatles and the Beach Boys with more ragged Southern rock and soul traditions. Then Hummel went, too, and Chilton slowly pieced together the ramshackle, melancholy "Third/Sister Lovers," one of the great divisive pop records, hated and beloved in equal measure. Those three releases make up the band's canon, and the new four-disk retrospective **"Keep an Eye on the Sky"** (Rhino) attempts to end decades of back-catalogue chaos.

As befits a career-spanning boxed set, the contents of "Keep an Eye on the Sky" are predictably surprising—there are tracks from the Chris Bell bands that directly preceded Big Star (Rock City and Icewater, if you're scoring at home), early demos, alternate versions, and a live disk from 1973. There's ample evidence of Chilton and Bell's classic-pop songwriting, aggressively wimpy singing, and persistent minor weirdness. There are demos, including "Lovely Day," an early version of the wonderful "Stroke It Noel" that has been on collections before but is no less welcome here. And, as a result of the set's scholarly presentation, some of the songs' pedigrees become clear in ways they haven't before (the winsome lost-love plaint "Way Out West" now sounds like a direct descendant of "Frank Mills," from the "Hair" soundtrack). In the decades since Big Star failed to ascend to celebrity, the group has continued on as it once was: the ultimate cult band, brilliantly haphazard. The surviving members—Bell died in a car wreck in 1978—have added Ken Stringfellow and Jon Auer, of the Posies, and reunited several times for both live and studio projects (the most recent record, "In Space," was greeted with near-unanimous indifference in 2005). They will pull on their boots one more time in November, in Brooklyn, for a show at the Masonic Temple.

—*Ben Greenman*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

TOM BURR
The tropes of modern sculpture, from the readymade to rectilinear minimalism, become players in a cryptic and campy personal drama. Just inside the gallery entrance, a black overcoat hangs from the knob of a black-painted door; it's a sculptural double entendre, both a monochrome monolith and an absent body. Elsewhere, old sneakers are displayed in Judd-like Plexiglas boxes; blue pajamas are draped across a hinged board that's folded on the floor in a zigzag, like the world's least cozy chaise longue. Black-and-white photographs, taken in Burrville, Connecticut, form an incomplete grid, as if to suggest that its story is open-ended. Maybe so, but it's also exhausted. Aiming for ambiguity, Burr achieves ennui. Through Oct. 31. (Bortolami, 510 W. 25th St. 212-727-2050.)

DAVID KENNEDY CUTLER
The young Brooklyn-based artist makes his solo début with a striking group of transparent sculptures that carry a torch for Richard Serra's late-sixties experiments in rubber and lead, not to men-

tion the frozen turbulence of Rodin's "Monument to Balzac." To make the freestanding works, Cutler armed himself with two heat guns and wrestled with a four-foot-by-eight-foot sheet of Plexiglas; twists and undulations trace his progress. Think of it as "action sculpture." Almost as interesting are the photographs of Cutler, taken by Mellissa Jane Huber, playing Hans Namuth to his gas-mask-wearing Pollock. Through Oct. 24. (Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411.)

AMY STEIN

Stein's big color photographs of wild animals that have strayed into suburbia probe the increasingly problematic balance between man and nature. Based on actual accounts but staged with real and stuffed critters, the images typically capture a deer, a fox, or a bobcat looking stranded and bewildered at the side of a highway or in someone's back yard. Other animals find themselves in direct confrontation with humans, like the bear staring down a startled little girl across a wire fence, or the raccoon cornered on a basketball court by two teenagers, one wielding a skateboard. These encounters—comic, tragic, absurd—generate Stein's most pointed pictures. Through Oct. 31. (ClampArt, 521-531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

REBECCA WARREN

The British artist is best known for big unfired clay sculptures, which update the figure studies that nineteenth-century artists made before casting their works in more permanent bronze. The ceramics here (and related painted bronzes) suggest outsize ancestors of the Woman of Willendorf or primordial takes on R. Crumb, with bulbous breasts and genitalia. When Warren invokes twentieth-century modernism, in steel sculptures that recall Tony Smith and Anthony Caro, the show is less engaging, although the little pompoms she's placed on a couple of the objects lighten the air of faux-macho austerity. Through Oct. 24. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

Short List

BERNADETTE CORPORATION: Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through Oct. 17. **TROY BRAUNTUCH:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Oct. 17. **RAOUL DE KEYSER:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Oct. 24. **VINCENT FECTEAU:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through Oct. 24. **GEORGE GROSZ:** Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190. Through Oct. 31. **SIMEN JOHAN:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through Oct. 31. **ROSY KEYSER:** Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Through Nov. 14. **ENOC PEREZ:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through Oct. 10. **MAGNUS PLESSEN:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Oct. 24. **FRANK STELLA:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474. Opens Oct. 1. **HAYLEY TOMPKINS:** Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849. Through Oct. 17. **WILL YACKULIC:** Bailey, 511 W. 25th St. 212-989-0156. Through Oct. 10. **"ONE MINUTE MORE":** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Through Oct. 31.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

ADAM PUTNAM

A tall brick chimney looms at the back of the gallery, but the rest of Putnam's show consists of rather small, strange photographs, most of which involve architecture, interiors, and psychological space. All but two of the pictures are rephotographed shots of a video screen, putting more distance between the viewer and what looks like the surveillance feed from a torture chamber—or the record of an avant-garde performance piece starring the artist himself with his face bound in cord or paper. Reflections, distortions, and image manipulations (a long, bare leg ends in a languidly arched arm) take us far from the concrete world into a realm that David Lynch might have dreamed up—a place that's seductive, forbidding, and erotically charged. Through Oct. 17. (Taxter & Spengemann, 123 E. 12th St. 212-924-0212.)

Short List

BILL ADAMS: K.S. Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918. Through Oct. 24. **K8 HARDY:** Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006. Through Oct. 11. **MY BARBARIAN:** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through Oct. 18. **MICHAEL PATTERSON-CARVER:** Small A Projects, 261 Broome St. 212-274-0761. Through Oct. 18. **JON PESTONI / ZAK PREKOP:** Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564. Through Oct. 18. **SARA GREENBERGER RAFFERTY:** Uffner, 47 Orchard St. 212-274-0064. Through Oct. 25. **ADAM SCHECTER:** Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. 212-982-1930. Through Oct. 4. **CARAGH THURING:** Preston, 301 Broome St. 212-431-1105. Through Nov. 1. **"PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETE SOUZA":** Leica Gallery, 670 Broadway, at Bond St. 212-777-3051. Through Nov. 7.

DANCE

"FALL FOR DANCE"

In its final stretch, the festival offers several more Ballets Russes-related performances, including Ballet West's staging of Nijinska's flapper-era satire "Les Biches"—the original costumes were designed by Coco Chanel—and Mark Dendy's take on her brother Nijinsky's "Afternoon of a Faun," as well as the divine Diana Vishneva fluttering to her quiet end in Fokine's "Dying Swan." The Mark Morris Dance Group will perform his "Grand Duo," from 1993, and the week will come to a joyous close with Alvin Ailey's rollicking "Revelations." For a complete schedule, see www.nycitycenter.org. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Sept. 30-Oct. 3 at 8.)

EMIO GRECO | PC

The high-concept Netherlands-based company continues its riff on Dante's Divine Comedy with "[purgatorio] POPOPERA"—the part between Hell and paradise. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Sept. 29-30 at 7:30, Oct. 1-3 at 8, and Oct. 4 at 2.)

MARIA HASSABI

The Cypriot-born choreographer performs "Solo" (in association with the "Crossing the Line" festival), the second half of which will run in November. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Sept. 29-Oct. 1 and Oct. 3 at 7:30, Oct. 2 at 7:30 and 10, and Oct. 4 at 5:30.)

TRAJAL HARRELL

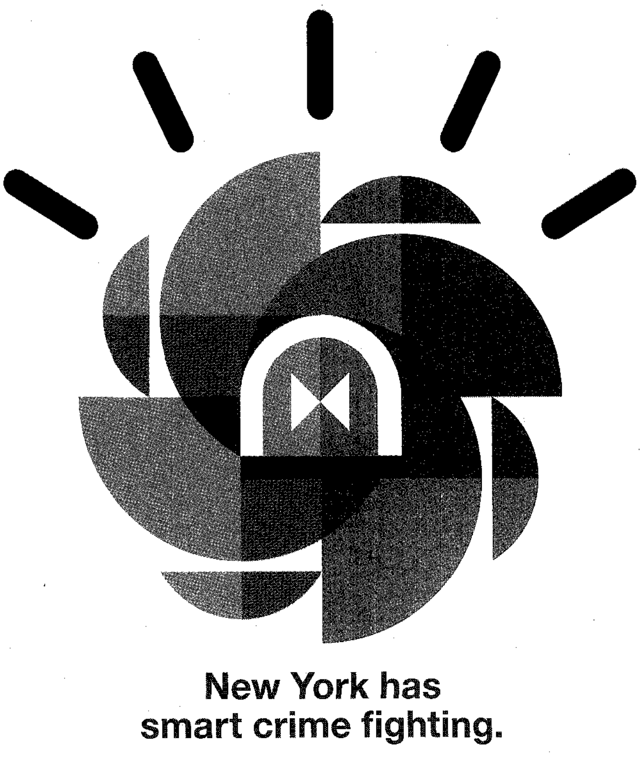
Having created a curious and quite personal hybrid of postmodernism (stripped down, light on dancing) and pop (fashion, sex), Harrell pushes the issue further in "Twenty Looks or Paris Is Burning at the Judson Church (S)." The evening-length work, which will be presented by Danspace Project and the New Museum (as part of the "Crossing the Line" festival), poses the question, What would have happened if a voguer from the nineteen-sixties Harlem drag-ball scene travelled downtown to perform with the early postmodern choreographers? (New Museum, 235 Bowery, at Prince St. 212-219-1222. Oct. 1-2 at 7.)

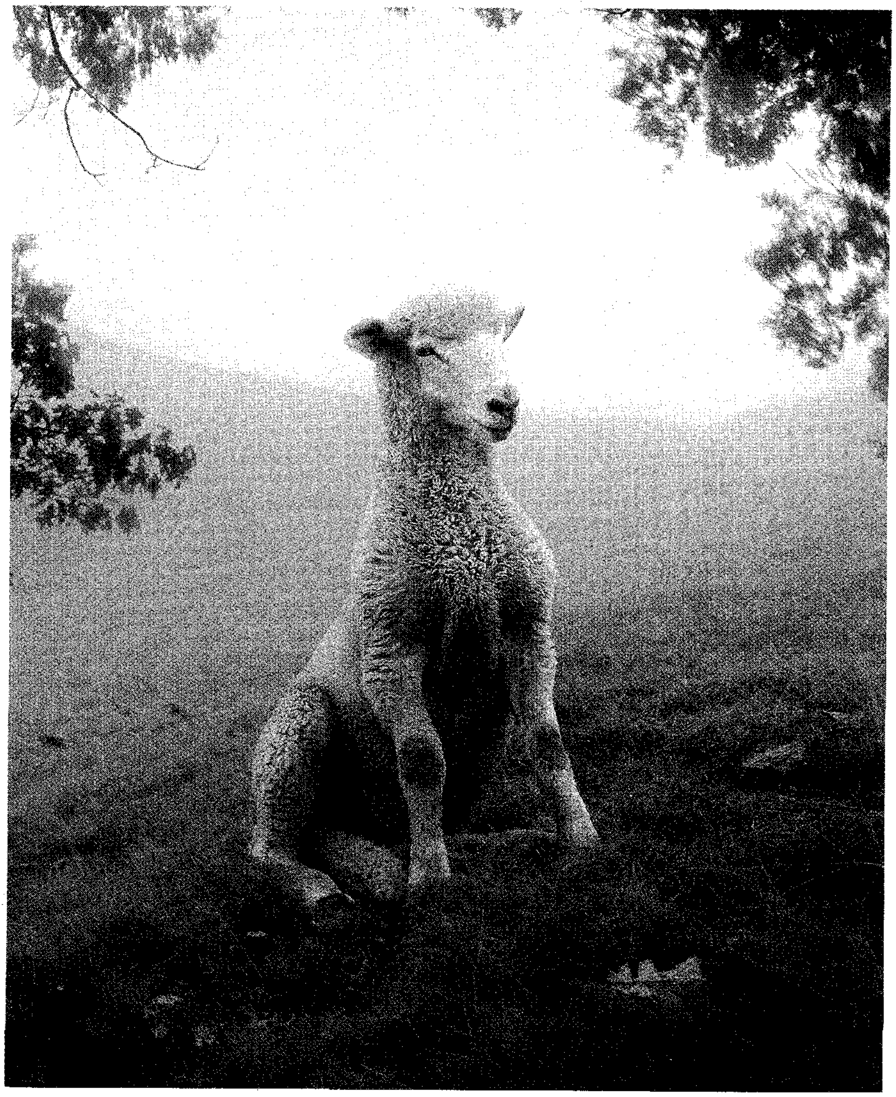
LUCY GUERIN INC.

The Australian choreographer's well-titled "Structure and Sadness" is an unlikely accomplishment: an affecting dance about engineering. The subject—the collapse of a Melbourne bridge in 1970—is explicitly referenced through news reports and more imaginatively evoked through choreography that exploits and illustrates relevant physical forces. While wailing women make too-direct claims for sympathy, the domino fate of a house of cards works like tragedy. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 1-3 at 7:30.)

DOUGLAS DUNN & DANCERS

As Danspace Project celebrates thirty-five years of presenting, the veteran choreographer, who's been supplying New York with elegantly intelligent dances





A photograph by Simen Johan, from his show "Until the Kingdom Comes," at Milo.

for longer than that, settles into St. Mark's Church for a two-week run. The first week sees a revival of Dunn's "Sky Eye," from 1989, enlivened by a stellar new cast that includes Liz Filbrun, Paul Singh, and Christopher Williams. The music hops across continents and centuries, ranging from Palestrina to Debussy to Ghanaian drumming, and the dancers, wearing dark cloaks that they cast off to reveal bright colors, move from dispassionate reserve to something wilder. Dunn's new "Cleave" premières during week two. (Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Oct. 1-3 at 8. Through Oct. 10.)

BIG DANCE THEATRE

In its real-time tracking of a pop singer as she wanders the city awaiting the results of a medical test, Agnes Varda's classic New Wave film "Cléo from 5 to 7" would seem resistant to theatrical adaptation. "Comme Toujours Here I Stand," Paul Lazar and Annie-B Parson's dance-theatre rendering of the script, meets that resistance head on, seeking choreographic equivalents for a mobile camera. Made partly in Lyon, the work evokes that city of bridges and stairs in the present while harking back to the sixties—building a dance number, for example, from the famous one in Godard's "Band of Outsiders." (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Oct. 1-4 at 8. Through Oct. 10.)

PACO PEÑA FLAMENCO DANCE COMPANY

The venerable guitar virtuoso returns to Town Hall with his no-frills, traditional presentation "A Compás!" ("In the Rhythm!"). Of the dancers, Charo Espino weaves a spell with her castanets, Ramón Martínez provides plentiful fireworks, and Ángel Muñoz offers the whole package in smoldering form. (123 W. 43rd St. 212-545-7536. Oct. 2 at 8.)

DOUG VARONE AND DANCERS / "STRIPPED"

Doug Varone will present a series of stripped-down studio showings at the 92nd Street Y. In the first, Varone and his dancers perform a work-in-progress, "Chapters from a Broken Novel," a suite of intimate portraits based on Varone's readings, movies he's seen, and his perceptions of people on the street. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-279-3344. Oct. 2 at 8.)

THE SUZANNE FARRELL BALLET

This company is well worth the trip to Princeton, if only to experience an alternate vision of Balanchine, as staged by one of his greatest muses. Farrell, who danced for New York City Ballet from the sixties into the eighties, created roles in countless Balanchine works, from Dulcinea in "Don Quixote" to the central diamond in "Jewels" and Euridice in "Chaconne." At the McCarter Theatre, her troupe will perform a rarity (a pas de deux from "Clarinade"), as well as excerpts from "Divertimento No. 15," all of "Agon" (a modernist masterpiece), and a pas de deux from Maurice Béjart's 1966 "Romeo and Juliet." (91 University Pl., Princeton, N.J. 619-258-2787. Oct. 4 at 3.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Julie Taymor's popular production of **"Die Zauberflöte"** returns, under the supple baton of the Québécois conductor Bernard Labadie, with a cast that features Susanna Phillips, Erika Miklósa, Matthias Klink, and Christopher Maltman. Sung in German. (Sept. 30 at 8.) ♦ Few of the Met's productions have been more reliably successful than Jonathan Miller's **"Le Nozze di Figaro"**: with its whitewashed walls and sun-soaked rooms, the elegant setting is the perfect blank canvas to introduce up-and-coming talent. Emma Bell, new to the Met, is an enchanting Countess, with a voice as large and resonant as it is poised and limber; in her house role début, Isabel Leonard sings radiantly as the irrepressible Cherubino. With Danielle de Niese in the role of Susanna, Bo Skovhus as the Count, and John Relyea as Figaro; the orchestra responds to newcomer Dan Ettinger with a springy, ingratiating performance. (Oct. 1 and Oct. 5 at 8.) ♦ A performance of the Sonja Frisell production of **"Aida,"** with towering sets and a cast of hundreds of singers, dancers, and supernumeraries, is a permanent attraction in the Met's repertory. This revival—well cast, as usual, with Violeta Urmana, Dolora Zajick, Johan Botha, and Carlo Guelfi in the leading roles—includes new choreography by Alexei Ratmansky; the estimable Daniele Gatti conducts. (Oct. 2 at 8.) ♦ The chief advantage of Luc Bondy's new production of **"Tosca"** is that it gives Karita Mattila, a zestful singing actress, room to create a fresh interpretation that might not have been possible under the magnificent weight of the old Zeffirelli staging. George Gagnidze manages to make a convincing portrayal of Scarpia, prowling around the blank spaces of Richard Peduzzi's cheap-looking sets; the Cavaradossi, Marcelo Álvarez, sings capably but struggles to escape from Bondy's enervated atmosphere. Joseph Colaneri conducts. (Oct. 3 at 1.) ♦ With James Levine replacing Colaneri. (Oct. 6 at 8.) ♦ Bartlett Sher's saucy and ebullient production of **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia"** returns to the schedule, with Joyce DiDonato as its Rosina and with Barry Banks, Rodion Pogossov, John Del Carlo, and Orlin Anastassov completing the cast; Maurizio Benini. (Oct. 3 at 8:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

REMARKABLE THEATRE BRIGADE: "OPERA SHORTS"

The roving chamber-opera company sets up shop at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall to offer compact entertainments by such composers as Tom Cipullo, Anne Phillips, Seymour Barab, and Christian McLeer; the singers include the baritone Chris Trakas and the tenors Robert White and Will Ferguson. (Oct. 1 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

A repeat of Magnus Lindberg's "Expo," the brief, glittering orchestral showpiece that began Alan Gilbert's opening-night concert, is featured in this week's subscription program, which moves on to explore the wide-eyed Americana of Ives (the Second Symphony and "The Unanswered Question") and the Germanic profundity of Beethoven (the Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, with Emanuel Ax). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 at 7:30 and Oct. 3 at 8.) ♦ Note: Ax and Gilbert will reprise the concerto in a concert at Caramoor, in Westchester, which will also include Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. (www.caramoor.org. Oct. 2 at 8.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Carnegie Hall's season-opening concert is a tale of two soloists: the glamorous keyboard star Evgeny Kissin (performing Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor) and the B.S.O.'s redoubtable lady of the harp, Ann Hobson Pilot (featured in the New York première of "On Willows and Birches," by John Williams). James Levine shepherds the program, which begins with Berlioz's "Roman Carnival" Overture and ends with Debussy's "La Mer." (212-247-7800. Oct. 1 at 7.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA

The school, which is beginning a new program in historically informed performance practice, brings in the jaunty Baroque specialist Nicholas McGegan to conduct Juilliard's élite orchestra in works by Britten (the dolorous folk-song suite "A Time There Was . . ."), Mozart, and Mendelssohn (the "Scotch" Symphony). (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Oct. 2 at 8. Free tickets, which are required, are available at the box office.)

RECITALS

"THE GEMS PROJECT"
Gotham Early Music Scene finds a niche at (Le) Poisson Rouge for three concerts. The first is offered by the groups Uncommon Temperament (performing chamber music by Handel), East of the River (playing ancient folk music from Europe and Central Asia), and Clarion Music Society (a very rare performance of music from the court of Catherine the Great). (158 Bleecker St. Sept. 30 at 7:30. For tickets and full listings, see www.lprnyc.com.)

MIRROR VISIONS ENSEMBLE
Friends & Enemies of New Music presents a concert by this enterprising and experienced group of young singers (including Vira Slywotzky, who represented the U.S. in the most recent Singer of the World competition), who offer spacious song cycles by Tom Cipullo ("A Visit with Emily") and Russell Platt ("From Noon to Starry Night: A Walt Whitman Cantata"). (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Sept. 30 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

BARGEMUSIC
The violinist Mark Peskanov, the artistic director of the floating chamber-music series, and the pianist Doris Stevenson begin the week with a recital that evokes a lush, prewar ambience: music by Bach, Mozart (an arrangement of the dulcet Adagio and Rondo for Violin and Orchestra), Taneyev, and Sibelius (the Five Pieces for Violin and Piano, Op. 81), along with virtuoso bonbons by Kreisler and Sarasate. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Sept. 30 and Oct. 3 at 8. For full listings, see www.bargemusic.org.)

DEL SOL QUARTET
Symphony Space is celebrating Latin-American culture this season. Its first classical program, offered by this San Francisco ensemble, follows that plan, but with a twist, combining string quartets by Tania León ("Esencia") and Gabriela Ortiz with the first U.S. performances of works by the Polish composers Pawel Mykietyn and Pawel Szymanski. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Oct. 1 at 7:30.)

THE PHOENIX CONCERTS: "ION SOUND"
The enterprising vocal-oriented series on the Upper West Side makes a foray into bold new instrumental repertory, with a concert featuring the flutist Peggy Yoo and the pianist Robert Frankenberry (among other musicians) performing works by Orianna Webb, Libby Larsen ("Firebrand"), Michael Torke ("After the Forest Fire"), and the downtown keyboard magus Jed Distler. (Church of St. Matthew and St. Timothy, 26 W. 84th St. Oct. 2 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

"ITZHAK PERLMAN PLAYS CHAMBER MUSIC"
Metropolitan Museum audiences love tradition and keep their favorite artists close at hand. The eminent violinist—who first played here more than forty years ago—returns to open the season, joining his young protégés from the Perlman Music Program in music by Brahms (the String Sextet in B-Flat Major), Shostakovich, and Vivaldi ("Autumn" and "Winter," from "The Four Seasons"). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 3 at 7.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES: DIALOGOS
This invaluable organization brings in some of the world's most compelling early-music performers for the delectation of New York audiences. Katarina Livljanić's medieval group, based in France, kicks off the season at Corpus Christi Church with a concert that explores vocal polyphony from the abbeys at Winchester and Fleury sur Loire, circa 1000. (529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Oct. 4 at 4.)

DAVID AARON CARPENTER
Violists of the first rank, combining technical assurance with charismatic flair, don't come around all that often. The next is undoubtedly Carpenter, who performs pieces by Takemitsu, Penderecki, Prokofiev, and Piazzolla (with the pianist Julien Quentin and the violinist Sean Avram Carpenter) in a concert at (Le) Poisson Rouge. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Oct. 5 at 7:30.)

DANIELLE DE NIESE
De Niese, a young soprano renowned for her beauty as well as her voice, is enjoying her belle époque, singing at the Met and cutting records for Decca. In an appeal to a younger than average audience, she heads downtown to (Le) Poisson Rouge to offer a selection of Mozart arias. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Oct. 6 at 7:30.)

CONCERTANTE
The vibrant young string ensemble invites a formidable emerging pianist, Shai Wosner, to begin its season at Merkin Concert Hall by joining its members in piano quartets by Brahms (in C Minor, Op. 60) and Fauré. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Oct. 6 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

AFTERSCHOOL
A drama, directed by Antonio Campos, about a prep-school student who unintentionally videotapes a deadly accident. Opening Oct. 2. (Cinema Village.)

AN AMERICAN JOURNEY
Philippe Séclier directed this documentary, about the photographer Robert Frank and his book "The Americans." Opening Sept. 30. (Film Forum.)

AS SEEN THROUGH THESE EYES
A documentary, directed by Hilary Helstein, about artists interned in concentration camps during the Second World War. Opening Oct. 2. (In limited release.)

A BEAUTIFUL LIFE
In this drama, directed by Alejandro Chomski, a teen-age runaway (Angela Sarafyan) befriends an illegal immigrant (Jesse Garcia). Opening Oct. 2. (Quad Cinema.)

THE HORSE BOY
Michel Orion Scott directed this drama, about a Texas couple who take their autistic son to Mongolia in quest of shamanistic healing. Opening Sept. 30. (IFC Center.)

THE INVENTION OF LYING
A comedy, starring Tina Fey, Jennifer Garner, and Ricky Gervais, about a world in which everyone speaks the truth. Written and directed by Gervais and Matthew Robinson. Opening Oct. 2. (In wide release.)

MORE THAN A GAME
A documentary about the high-school days of the basketball player LeBron James, directed by Kristopher Belman. Opening Oct. 2. (In limited release.)

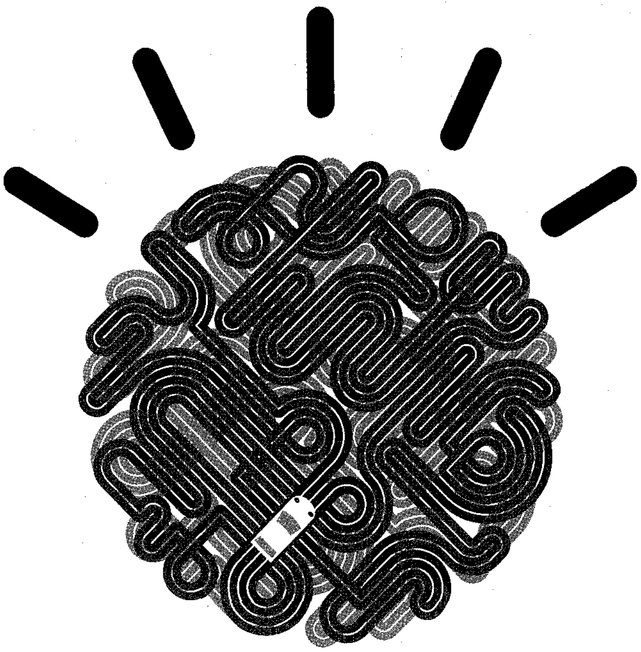
A SERIOUS MAN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 2. (In wide release.)

WHIP IT
Drew Barrymore directed this drama, about a young Texan misfit (Ellen Page) who joins a roller-derby league. Opening Oct. 2. (In wide release.)

ZOMBIELAND
A horror film, directed by Ruben Fleischer, about the survivors of a zombie plague. Starring Jesse Eisenberg and Woody Harrelson. Opening Oct. 2. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

BRIGHT STAR
In 1818, a half-educated but boldly self-possessed beauty named Fanny Brawne (Abbie Cornish) captures the admiration, and then the love, of a tubercular young man (Ben Whishaw). He's a most unpromising fellow: sometimes spirited and funny, yet often sunk in quiet and seemingly remote unhappiness. The writer-director, Jane Campion ("The Piano"), does not play up the irony that the young man, John Keats, would soon be known, despite much early dismissal of his work, as one of the greatest poets in English since Shakespeare and Milton. The movie is not the kind of portentous bio-pic in which history, like some sort of hooded



eagle, perches on the shoulders of every scene, waiting to soar. As much as she can, Campion keeps the action day-by-day, small-scale, and casually lyrical. Many of Whishaw and Cornish's scenes together have a high-spirited delicacy that borders on the precious and then safely pulls back to the everyday. Campion makes only one serious mistake: Whishaw recites the lines "Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast / To feel for ever its soft swell and fall" when he is actually resting his head on Cornish's chest. The period re-creation, sure-handed yet unemphatic, is extraordinary. With Paul Schneider as Keats's protector and amanuensis, Charles Brown.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/21/09.) (In wide release.)

CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

COCO BEFORE CHANEL

Fulfilling the promise of its title, Anne Fontaine's film lifts the veil on the early years of Gabrielle Chanel. This is no guarantee of the naked truth, since, as Chanel's biographers admit, she was ferociously adept at cloaking her unmodish past in legend and lies; but our heroine's progress, nonetheless, has an air of plausibility—from the small, suffering lass at the orphanage to an unsuccessful tavern singer who segues smartly into a kept woman. The keepers are, first, a jolly landowner (Benoît Poelvoorde), and, second, a suspiciously smooth British heartbreaker named Boy (Alessandro Nivola). (Did Chanel, no fool, not realize that, under the rules of romance, you should never fall for a man called Boy?) These actors fare slightly better than Audrey Tautou, who launches into the lead role but seems unable to quell her natural cuteness; the real Coco could not have achieved what she did, you feel, without being as hard as chrome. Fashion followers, panting to see some classic Chanel designs, may feel cheated, since the movie halts precisely as her business gets going; there is a curious afterthought, before the final credits, in which modern supermodels traipse past the grande dame herself, but it's not clear what period—or what sort of ghostly fantasy—we are being invited to watch.—*Anthony Lane* (9/28/09) (In wide release.)

DISGRACE

In adapting J. M. Coetzee's celebrated 1999 novel, the screenwriter Anna Maria Monticelli and the director Steve Jacobs (who are husband and wife) have tried to create a visual tone analogous to his extraordinary prose—dry, spare, abruptly violent. The movie, shot in South Africa and Australia, is skillful and tense, and the landscapes are magnificent, but the implacable rhythm of Coetzee's sentences, which makes the book impossible to put down, escapes the filmmakers, and would probably escape any filmmakers. John Malkovich is the played-out literature professor who is fired from a Cape Town university for sleeping with an undergraduate; the wonderful South African actress Jessica Haines is his tough-souled daughter, who lives deep in the country and takes him in. In the wake of the violence that ensues, the movie, like the book, poses several key questions: Who shall control the land of South Africa? Who will be the country's children? With Eriq Ebouaney as the black South African who shares the daughter's homestead.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

DISTRICT 9

This is the first feature from Neill Blomkamp, who sets it in his native Johannesburg—taking the ethnic tensions and economic inequalities that already exist there and throwing a fresh, unexpected irritant into the mix. For the first few minutes, the movie sounds and looks like a documentary, with a fidgety office worker called Wikus Van De Merwe (Sharlto Copley) discussing the relocation of aliens. We presume that this is bureaucratic shorthand for unwanted immigrants, and so, in a way, it is; but these are real aliens, from outer space—graceless, snarling bipeds known as "prawns." The wrath and suspicion they provoke among humans feel horribly familiar, and Blomkamp doesn't need to highlight the moral of his tale; instead, he quickens it into a bloody game of hide-and-seek, with Wikus himself becoming a disfigured outcast and, against all his instincts, seeking the aid of a prawn. Like the aliens browsing through refuse for weaponry and food, the film trawls for visual tactics of every kind, from news footage to clips from security cameras, and the result is something new: a startling, redoubtable thriller constructed on the cheap from a decaying world.—*A.L.* (9/14/09) (In wide release.)

ECCENTRICITIES OF A BLOND HAIR GIRL

This recession-age fable, which revolves around love, work, family pressures, and hidebound traditions, is set in contemporary Lisbon but breathes the air of a dreamy, timeless romanticism—one that befits the long view of life taken by its hundred-year-old director, Manoel de Oliveira. The story, told in flashbacks, is framed by a train ride to a rural resort where Macário (Ricardo Trêpa) is going to recover from a shattered affair; he chooses to unburden himself to the stranger seated beside him. This quiet listener, played by Leonor Silveira—Oliveira's muse for the last two of his eight decades in cinema—begins the proceedings with a screen-piercing stroke of genius that turns a cliché into a marvel. Macário pours out to her his tale of working as an accountant at his uncle's sumptuous fabric shop and falling in love, from a distance and at first sight, with a coy young woman (Catarina Wallenstein) who's looking out a window across the street. She turns out to be a wealthy heiress, her house a lavish villa, and her cultural milieu one of great refinement and greater cruelty. Oliveira brings a dry, sensual elegance to this tale of hearts confounded by circumstances and silences, and he portrays social formalities as mating rituals for human animals on the verge of brutality. In Portuguese.—*Richard Brody* (New York Film Festival; Oct. 3.)

THE INFORMANT!

At first, we think that Mark Whitacre (Matt Damon, with a wavy pompadour and steel-rimmed glasses) is the epitome of Midwestern square. In 1992, Whitacre, an executive at the agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland, was part of a price-fixing scheme. Trapped, he begins collaborating with the F.B.I., wearing a wire in meetings with colleagues. He turns into a foolish risk-taker, a kind of electrified dork who imagines himself a hero out of the movies. He gets results, and the Justice Department builds its case. But then, by degrees, everything he says begins to sound false. One lie encases another, and then another. We're shocked, and the director, Steven Soderbergh, moves swiftly and surely through short scenes, keeping the style thoroughly ambiguous—lodged somewhere between thriller and farce. "The Informant!," based on a true story, is a full-scale production with locations all over the globe, yet it's also an aggressively perverse joke. By the end, the movie becomes a minor classic about the unreliability of judgment and the instability of truth. Scott Z. Burns, working freely with Kurt Eichenwald's 2000 book, wrote the screenplay. With Scott Bakula and also such comedians as Joel McHale and Tom Papa, who give their lines slightly ironic inflections—a pause, a smile—that throw the scenes off kilter.—*D.D.* (9/21/09) (In wide release.)

INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS

In Quentin Tarantino's fantastical jest about the Second World War, a group of European film people and an American Army unit of vengeful Jews, the Basterds, led by a Gentile, Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt), separately plot to destroy the Nazi command, which has gathered at a movie theatre in Occupied Paris in 1944. For years, the Americans, operating in Occupied France, have been beating Nazi soldiers to death with baseball bats and carving swastikas in their foreheads. Whether the Basterds are Tarantino's ideal of an all-American killing team or his parody of one is hard to say. Very little in "Basterds" is meant to be taken straight, but the movie isn't quite farce, either. It's lodged in an uneasy nowheresville between counterfactual pop fantasia and trashy exploitation. The picture isn't boring, but it's ridiculous, and stunningly insensitive—a teen-ager's dream

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PAIR OF ACES

People love Alexei Ratmansky's work because it is both classical (you can see all the ballet steps—they're not slurred) and psychological, conveying some recognizable emotion or situation. Ratmansky should be treasured for his double gift, which has been the mark of all great ballet choreographers. Some of his pieces are flat-out narratives. Modestly (too modestly), he has specialized in revisions of corny old Soviet ballets that have scores worth saving—by Prokofiev or Shostakovich, for example. But the loveliest of his works, or those we have seen here, are only tinged with narrative. You sense what they're about, but the burden of meaning is not carried by a pirate and his girlfriend. Maybe the new piece that Ratmansky is making for American Ballet Theatre's short fall season at Avery Fisher Hall (Oct. 7-10) will be like that. In any case, it will have six dancers, performing to seven Scarlatti sonatas. It's a "piano ballet," a sneaky form that pretends it's a tossed-off little thing but in fact usually tries to hit you where you live.

—*Joan Acocella*

FIDO NESTI

of revenge too silly to enjoy, even as a joke. With the talented Christoph Waltz as a super-smart S.S. colonel. The role is a cliché of evil suavity out of old Warner Bros. movies, but Waltz is terrific at it.—*D.D.* (8/24/09) (In wide release.)

JENNIFER'S BODY
Megan Fox is Jennifer, a vixenish cheerleader, and Amanda Seyfried is Anita, called "Needy," her unlikely B.F.F., a style-free nerd who—after an unsolved series of gory murders of local boys—must confront Jennifer's transformation from figurative to literal man-eater. Diablo Cody's insistent script does all the work, setting up a few clever plot twists along with some resonant feminist metaphors, and the small-town milieu of forests and boredom, of single parents on night shifts and grungy amusements, provides an apt setting for demonic doings. Cody gets in some fun digs at the macho vulgarity of low-end indie rock and the sanctimonious rites of school spirit, but the "Juno"-style patter falls flat (though it's good to hear the girls talk dirty like the boys in "Superbad"). Unfortunately, the director, Karyn Kusama, concentrates more on sending messages of feminine empowerment than on conjuring metaphysical moods. The movie flits by blandly, like a genre novel for teens imprinted directly onscreen.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

JULIE & JULIA
Meryl Streep as Julia Child, an American in Paris in the fifties, longing to write a cookbook, and Amy Adams as Julie Powell, a lost young American wife in Queens in 2002, who replicates Child's recipes. The structure is more a rhyming device than a dramatic idea, yet it works well enough to hold together a dual fable of driving ambition and anxious discipleship. The movie is memorable, of course, for Streep's performance. Like a tall ship at full sail, she leans, tilts, and billows. Odd explosions of air—whoops, exclamations—come hurtling through the passageways. She runs out of breath, and then settles, mysteriously, like an old Bible that italicizes ordinary words, on a single syllable. Nora Ephron, who wrote and directed, is interested in food less as something to cook than as the binding and unifying element in marriage, dinner parties, and friendship. In all, one of the most charming American movies of recent years. With Stanley Tucci and Chris Messina as supportive husbands. Based on books by Child and Powell.—*D.D.* (8/24/09) (In wide release.)

MIN YÈ (TELL ME WHO YOU ARE)
From the standpoint of a romantic triangle in the Bamako beau monde, the Malian filmmaker Souleymane Cissé sketches a scathing portrait of a society that is rotting from the top down. The domineering, arrogant Mimi (Sokona Gakou), a well-to-do public-health bureaucrat, is having an affair with a younger man, Abba (Alou Sissoko), while married to Issa (Assane Kouyaté), a veteran filmmaker at work on a drama about an upper-class woman's adulterous affair. As the story sprawls and lurches like a soap opera through the expansive arc of its melodramatic plot points, Cissé maintains patience, and even tenderness, for his self-deluding characters while depicting a wide array of underlying ills, including polygamous marriage, political corruption and cronyism, inflexible class hierarchies, and religious hypocrisy. The pathos of an artist too tangled in his personal agonies to look outside his gated courtyard, of a doctor who lives large without seeing a single patient, and of a politically connected playboy with an invisible source of income is heightened by Cissé's stark visual contrast of chic white-walled villas with the roiling, unpaved roads just beyond. In Bambara.—*R.B.* (New York Film Festival; Oct. 5-6.)

THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN AMERICA: DANIEL ELLSBERG AND THE PENTAGON PAPERS
In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg, the former marine and Defense Department analyst, released to the New York *Times* the top-secret Pentagon Papers, an extended history of America's involvement in Vietnam, which

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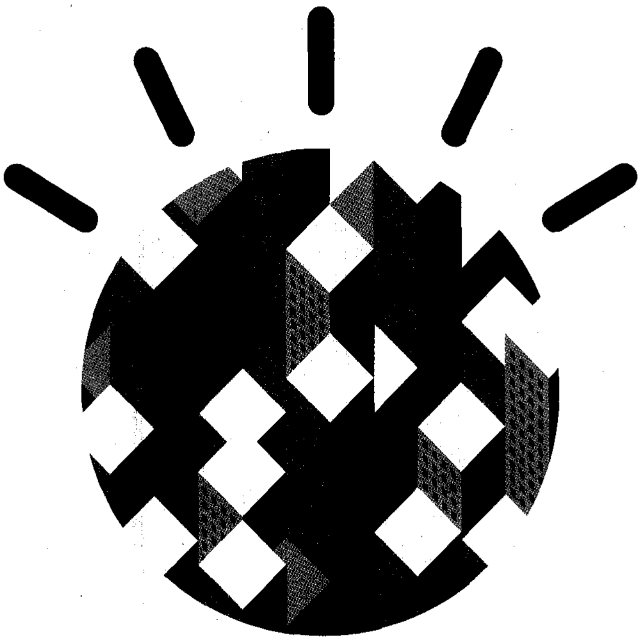

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revealed that various Administrations had lied to the public about what they were doing. Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith's documentary chronicles a kind of secular spiritual journey—from warrior to anti-warrior, from analyst to activist, from patriot to "traitor." Ellsberg himself, now in his late seventies, describes the stages of his transformation with his usual precision and ardor, and the filmmakers fill in events with news footage and rather hokey re-creations of Ellsberg's actions (such as a man in shadow speaking into a telephone). The movie gently suggests that, without considerable vanity and a touch of grandiosity, Ellsberg might never have acted as bravely as he did. But how many powerful men today take full responsibility for their actions? Featuring Oval Office tapes of Richard Nixon responding to Ellsberg's acts in his own ineffably vicious and low-minded style.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

9

Shane Acker's film begins with an ending: the world reduced to a dead zone of rusted, unpopulated townscapes, as a result of some ancient clash between triumphalist politicians and machines. The machines won. No organic beings remain, just a bestial contraption that stalks the streets, and, crouching in its shadow, a group of toylike creatures, patched together from leftover materials and known only by the numbers on their backs. Against the advice of 1 (voiced by Christopher Plummer), who hides in a ruined church, the dauntless 9 (Elijah Wood), the spunky 7 (Jennifer Connelly), and a handful of others set out to vanquish the mechanical brutes and prepare for the resumption of normal existence. How they achieve this is, to say the least, nebulous: something to do with hidden codes and the mint-green wraiths of their dead companions. But the film is itself given life by the wit and exactitude of the computer animation, which finds real texture and pathos in the fantastic.—*A.L.* (9/14/09) (In wide release.)

THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

As the title suggests, R. J. Cutler's conventional but engaging documentary about the inner workings of *Vogue* has its drama built into it: the race against time to compose and to complete the 2007 edition of the year's keystone issue, as seen from the top. Cutler anchors the film on a portrait of the magazine's editor-in-chief, Anna Wintour, but he wisely builds the action around her fruitful collaboration—and, at times, conflict—with Grace Coddington, *Vogue's* creative director, whose inspired concepts for photo shoots and hands-on stylings furnish the raw material for Wintour's synoptic shaping of the magazine and its place in the world. The regal André Leon Talley, the editor-at-large, provides comic relief, and, though the quick-cutting sprint through the wide-ranging action doesn't dig deep, the behind-the-scenes view of tussles with photographers and designers at least suggests the exacting aestheticism and practical smarts that fashion's fantasies both demand and reflect.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

35 SHOTS OF RUM

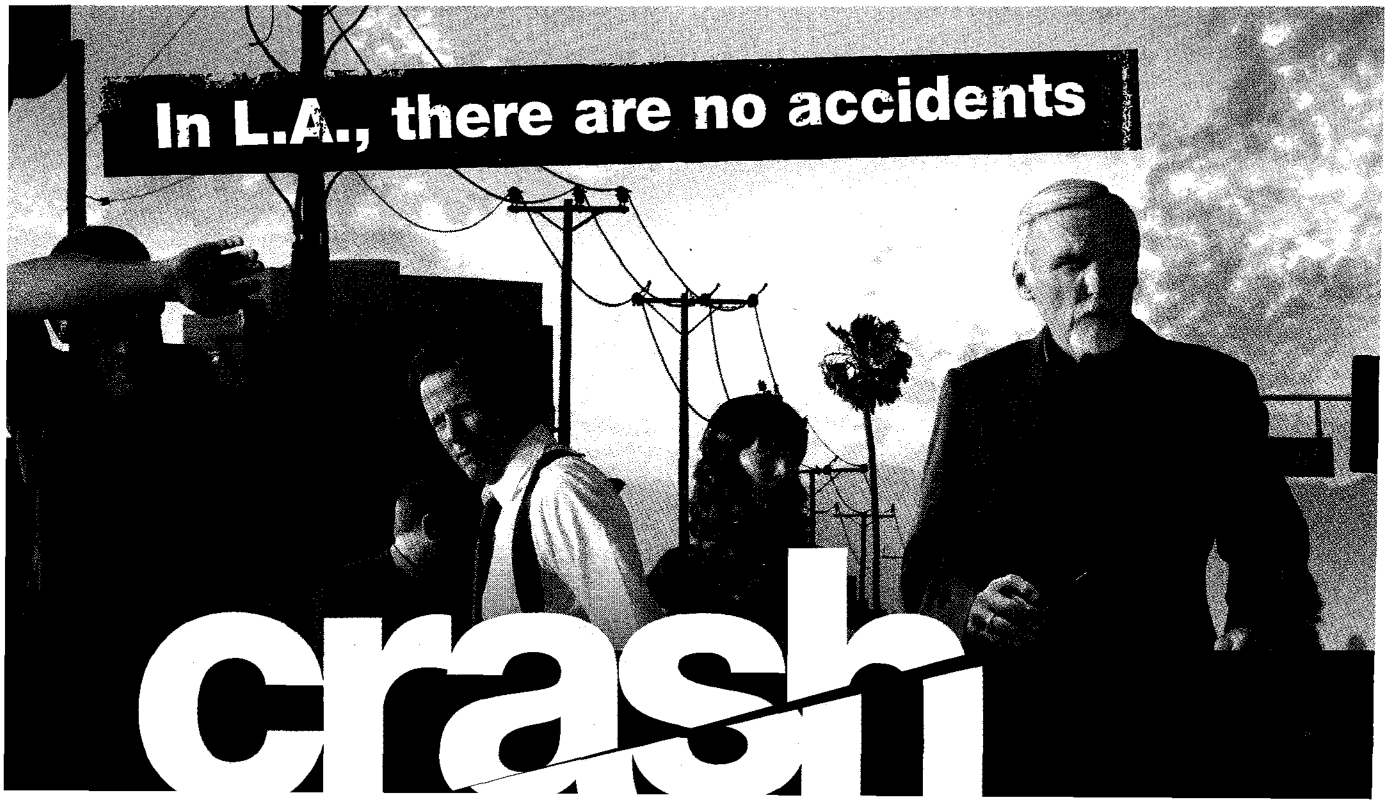
The French director Claire Denis's tender tribute to the bond between a father and a daughter brings the moody luminosity of the art house to a story as sentimental and untroubling as a Hallmark special. The drama, such as it is, concerns Lionel (Alex Descas), a widowed conductor on Paris's suburban lines, who shares an apartment in a bland suburban housing complex with his daughter, Joséphine (Mati Diop), a university student who is being courted by their neighbor, Noé (Grégoire Colin). The textures of daily life, the slight variations in the routines of work and leisure, of studies and amusements, are more suggested than conveyed; Denis's gentle, well-meaning conceptions of the working class, including the depictions of France as a multiracial society (Lionel, like most of his colleagues and Joséphine's classmates, is black; his wife was white), are heartwarming, unexceptionable, and as shallow as a campaign poster. Denis and her screenwriter, Jean-Pol Fargeau, make a familiar mistake that has become a convention: they lend working people gravitas by giving them almost nothing to say. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

WALT & EL GRUPO

In 1941, as part of a bid to spread American goodwill and secure the loyalty of South American states, Walt Disney and a bunch of his leading employees, including artists and animators, were flown down to Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile—"our first expedition of that kind," Walt said, as if they were seeking the source of the Amazon. To judge by Theodore Thomas's fond and painstaking documentary, Disney was the right man for the job; there's barely a frame in which his smile is not on full beam, and he was never one to stand on ceremony when he could dance, or ride, instead. The success of the trip leaves Thomas with a problem: how do you dramatize a mission that went according to plan? We get the travellers' steady letters home, but, more eventful and energetic, we get their open-air sketches: further proof, if any were needed, of the dazzling draughtsmanship on which Disney was able to call, although the cartoons that resulted, such as "Saludos Amigos," could only reproduce that verve in fits and starts. The ending has a mournful air: the team returned to a studio still smarting from a bitter strike, and then to war. And the Casino where they danced, on the Rio waterfront, is now a shell.—*A.L.* (9/28/09) (In limited release.)

Also Playing

THE BOYS ARE BACK: In limited release. **FAME:** In wide release. **I CAN DO BAD ALL BY MYSELF:** In wide release. **SURROGATES:** In wide release.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REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Heinz Emigholz. All films are in German. Oct. 1 at 7: "Schindler's Houses" (2007). ♦ Oct. 2 at 6:30: "Goff in the Desert" (2003). ♦ "The Walking Picture Palace." Oct. 5 at 7: "Pie Pellicane Jesu Domine," a performance by Bruce McClure. ♦ Oct. 5 at 9:15: "Trypps 1-6" (Ben Russell, 2005-09). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6:30: Short films by Chick Strand, including "Waterfall" (1967). ♦ Oct. 6 at 9:15: "Let Each One Go Where He May" (Russell, 2009).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through Sept. 30: "Rendez-Vous with Juliette Binoche." Sept. 30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Disengagement" (2007, Amos Gitai; in French). ♦ The films of Nicolas Winding Refn. Except where noted, all films are in Danish. Oct. 1 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Fear X" (2003; in English). ♦ Oct. 2 at 4:30 and 9:50: "Gambler" (2006; Phie Ambo). ♦ Oct. 2 at 6:50: "Bronson" (2009; in English), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Oct. 3 at 4: "Pusher" (1996), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Oct. 3 at 7: "Pusher 2: With Blood on My Hands" (2004). ♦ Oct. 3 at 9:15: "Pusher 3: I'm the Angel of Death" (2005). ♦ Oct. 4 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Bleeder" (1999).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Sept. 30-Oct. 1 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Fat City" (1972, John Huston). ♦ Oct. 2-8 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Some Like It Hot" (1959, Billy Wilder).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"(Re)Inventing China: A New Cinema for a New Society, 1949-1966," a New York Film Festival sidebar. All films are in Mandarin. Sept. 30 at 4:15: "Nie Er" (1959, Zheng Junli). ♦ Oct. 1 at 4: "The Red Detachment of Women" (1961, Xie Jin). ♦ Oct. 2 at 4:15 and Oct. 6 at 6:30: "Big Li, Little Li, and Old Li" (1962, Xie). ♦ Oct. 2 at 8:45: "Sentries Under Neon Lights" (1964, Wang Ping and Ge Xing). ♦ Oct. 5 at 4:15: "Woman Hairdresser" (1962, Ding Ran). ♦ Oct. 5 at 6:15: "Seventy-Two Tenants" (1963, Wang Weiyi). ♦ Oct. 5 at 8:15: "Living Forever in Burning Flames" (1965, Shui Hua). ♦ Oct. 6 at 4:15: "Keep the Red Flag Flying" (1960, Ling Zifeng). ♦ Oct. 6 at 8:30: "Two Stage Sisters" (1965, Xie). ♦ "Views from the Avant-Garde," a New York Film Festival sidebar. Oct. 2 at 6:30: Program 1, "La Rabbia di Pasolini" (2008, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Giuseppe Bertolucci). ♦ Oct. 3 at noon: Program 2, including "A Letter to Uncle Boonmee" (2009, Apichatpong Weerasethakul). ♦ Oct. 3 at 3: Program 3, "A Tribute to Chick Strand." ♦ Oct. 3 at 5: Program 4, including "O'er the Land" (2009, Deborah Stratman). ♦ Oct. 3 at 7: Program 5, including "In Comparison" (2009, Harun Farocki). ♦ Oct. 3 at 9:30: Program 6, including "Puccini Conservato" (2009, Michael Snow). ♦ Oct. 4 at 12:30: Program 7, including "I Miss" (2009, Annie Dorsen). ♦ Oct. 4 at 3: Program 8, including "The Last Happy Day" (2009, Lynne Sachs). ♦ Oct. 4 at 5:30: Program 9, including "Untitled" (1947, Norman Mailer). ♦ Oct. 4 at 7:45: Program 10, including "Waterfront Follies" (2009, Ernie Gehr). ♦ Oct. 4 at 9:45: Program 11, including "Physical Changes" (2009, David Dinnell).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Special screenings. Oct. 2-4 at 11 A.M.: "Southern Comfort" (2001, Kate Davis). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Oct. 2-3: "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" (1986, John Hughes). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Oct. 5 at 8: "October Country" (2009, Michael Palmieri and Donal Mosher). ♦ Oct. 6 at 8: "The Real Shaolin" (2008, Alexander Sebastien Lee), followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Sept. 30-Oct. 2 at 1:30: "Lesser-Known Pioneers of Cinema," including "La Vie du Christ" (1906, Alice Guy-Blaché; silent). ♦ "Looking at Music: Side 2." Oct. 1 at 7 and Oct. 3 at 1:30: "Blank City" (2009, Celine Danhier). ♦ Oct. 2 at 7: "Downtown 81" (1981, Edo Bertoglio). ♦ Oct. 4 at 5: "Deadly Art of Survival" (1979, Charlie Ahearn) and "Underground USA" (1980, Eric Mitchell).

NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL
Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center (212-671-4050)—Sept. 30 at 6: "A Room and a Half" (2009, Andrey Khrzhanovsky; in Russian). ♦ Sept. 30 at 9:15 and Oct. 1 at 6: "To Die Like a Man" (2009, João Pedro Rodrigues; in Portuguese). ♦ Oct. 1 at 9:30 and Oct. 2 at 3: "Lebanon" (2009, Samuel Maoz; in Hebrew). ♦ Oct. 1 at 10 and Oct. 2 at 11:30: "Trash Humpers" (2009, Harmony Korine; screening at Walter Reade Theatre). ♦ Oct. 2 at 6 and Oct. 3 at 4:15: "Sweet Rush" (2009, Andrzej Wajda; in Polish). ♦ Oct. 2 at 9 and Oct. 3 at 1: "Antichrist" (2009, Lars von Trier). ♦ Oct. 3 at 11 A.M.: "Eccentricities of a Blond Hair Girl" (†). ♦ Oct. 3 at 7 and 10: "Precious" (2009, Lee Daniels). ♦ Oct. 4 at noon: "Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno" (2009, Serge Bromberg and Ruxandra Medrea; in French). ♦ Oct. 4 at 3: "Independencia" (2009, Raya Martin; in Filipino and Tagalog). ♦ Oct. 4 at 6 and Oct. 6 at 9:15: "Hadewijch" (2009, Bruno Dumont; in French). ♦ Oct. 4 at 9 and Oct. 5 at 6: "Everyone Else" (2009, Maren Ade; in German). ♦ Oct. 5 at 9 and Oct. 6 at 6: "Min Yè (Tell Me Who You Are)" (†).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Oct. 2 at 9:30: "The Phantom of the Opera" (1943, Arthur Lubin).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@ Midnight." Oct. 2-3: "The Wiz" (1978, Sidney Lumet).

READINGS AND TALKS

BOOKCOURT
The novelist James Ellroy reads from his latest book, "Blood's a Rover." (163 Court St., Brooklyn. Sept. 30 at 7.)

"ON THE WATERFRONT IN NEW YORK"
Following a screening of "Street of Ships," a 1982 documentary by Charles Richards about the formation of the South Street Seaport, Robert LaValva, the founder and director of the New Amsterdam Market (a culinary retail effort in the tradition of the great urban public markets), talks about the past and the future of the neighborhood. The evening is organized by the Historic Districts Council, and it includes a discussion with Peter Stanford, the founder of the South Street Seaport Museum, and others following the presentation. (Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. For more information, call 212-614-9107. Oct. 1 at 6:30.)

MCNALLY JACKSON BOOKS
Jhumpa Lahiri wrote the introduction to Mavis Gallant's "The Cost of Living," a new collection of her hard-to-find stories published from 1951 to 1971. On Oct. 5 at 7, Lahiri reads from the book. (52 Prince St. No tickets necessary.)

"POEMS & PINTS"
The Poetry Society of America and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's monthly series at Fraunces Tavern returns for a new season, beginning with readings by Jill Bialosky and Susan Wheeler. (54 Pearl St. For more information, call 212-254-9628. Oct. 6 at 6:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

HOUSING WORKS BOOKSTORE CAFÉ
The San Francisco band Dredg, which has staked its career on prog-rock antics (its 1998 début, "Leitmotif," was a concept album about a man with spiritual malaise who travels the world looking for a cure), found inspiration for its new release, "The Pariah, the Parrot, the Delusion," in an essay by Salman Rushdie titled "Imagine There's No Heaven: A Letter to the Sixth Billionth Citizen." They've since convinced Rushdie to join them onstage. He will appear with them on Oct. 1 at 7, for a reading and performance to benefit the nonprofit AIDS service organization Housing Works. (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The big houses focus on domestic treasures this week, with sales of American art and crafts. **Sotheby's** presents a group of mostly nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century paintings, drawings, and sculptures (Sept. 30), several from the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, including five lush and mysterious oils by Arthur Bowen Davies, an American symbolist and a member of the Eight. Then, after a day devoted to European furniture, ceramics, and tapestries (Oct. 2), the house offers mid-priced Impressionist art (Oct. 6), including a significant number of works by Russian and Latin-American artists. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** rounds out its American offerings with a more down-home mix of furniture (including an impressive Chippendale bombé chest), folk art, and prints (Sept. 30). One piece, at least, has a well-travelled past—a very rare hand-carved wooden goose decoy from the nineteenth century that once belonged to a "rig" of six such decoys, used for tricking unsuspecting geese during hunting season. For the past twenty years, this particular specimen has been living on a sheep ranch in Patagonia in southern Argentina, having been transported there by an American expatriate with a fondness for remote places. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Phillips**, uncowed by recent trends in the art market, is amping up its contemporary sales with a new series of themed auctions (accompanied by hip new catalogues) that begins in London with a sale of very recent art works. The focus then turns to New York, where the "Latin America" sale will take place on Oct. 3 at the auctioneer's downtown headquarters (right by the High Line), offering prints by Tamayo, Zúñiga, and Matta, as well as photographs (including several of Frida Kahlo) and recent works by artists of the moment like Jorge Méndez Blake (from Mexico) and Carlos Enriquez-Gonzalez (from Venezuela). (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

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TARA HARDY

ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
LUCKY CHARMS
Oct. 8

The recent "Encores!" concert production of "Finian's Rainbow" expands into a full-blown Broadway show, at the St. James. Jim Norton, Kate Baldwin, Cheyenne Jackson, and Christopher Fitzgerald star in the musical satire from 1947—it was also a 1968 film starring Fred Astaire and directed by Francis Ford Coppola—in which an Irishman buries a pot of gold in Missitucky in the hope that it will magically multiply. (212-239-6200.)

ART
NATIONAL TREASURE
Oct. 12-Jan. 24

"American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915," at the Met, traces the country's values of individualism and community in more than a hundred canvases, including John Singleton Copley's 1768 portrait of Paul Revere and Frederic Remington's "Fight for the Waterhole," from 1903. (212-535-7710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ROYAL SERENADE
Oct. 19

Few ensembles mix new and old music with the aplomb of the Knights, the dynamic Brooklyn-based chamber orchestra. Their free concert at the Baryshnikov Arts Center offers music for strings by Vivaldi, Purcell, and Scelsi. (www.bacnyc.org.)

MOVIES
RESCUE MISSIONS
Oct. 24-Nov. 15

MOMA's annual series "To Save and Project" brings together new restorations of classic films from around the world. This year's edition begins with a weeklong run of John Cassavetes's "A Woman Under the Influence," from 1975, and also includes such rarities as Luchino Visconti's melodrama "Senso," Frank Capra's "Forbidden," and "Nanook of the North." (212-708-9480.)

NIGHT LIFE
ON THE STAGE
Oct. 28

A week after the fortieth anniversary of the death of Jack Kerouac, Jay Farrar and Ben Gibbard hit Webster Hall with songs from "One Fast Move or I'm Gone: Kerouac's Big Sur," the soundtrack for the new documentary of the same name. (800-745-3000.)

A tribute to Jack Kerouac, with Jay Farrar and Ben Gibbard, at Webster Hall.

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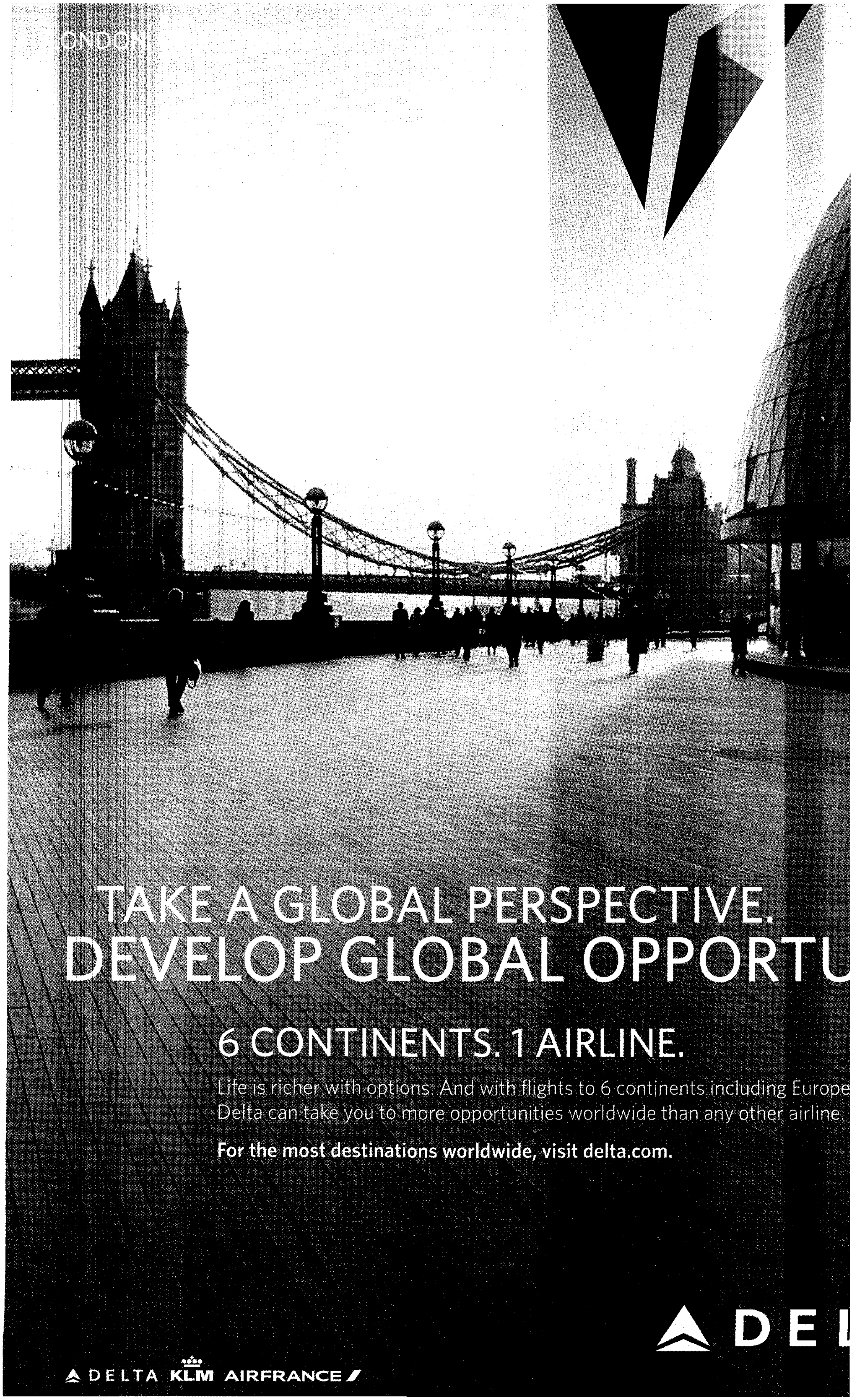

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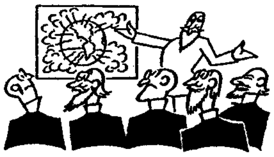
COMMENT
LEADING CAUSES

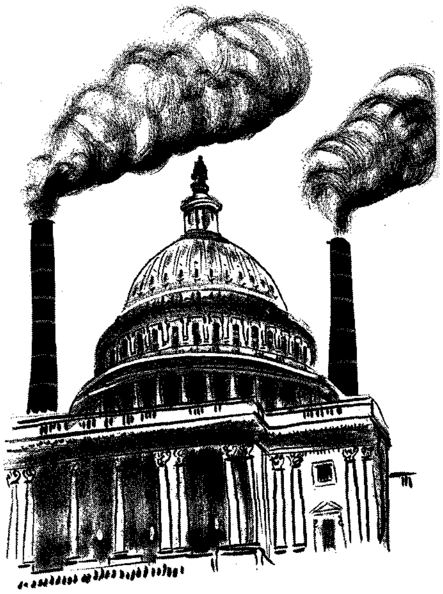


On October 13, 1992, the United States became the world's first industrialized nation to ratify a treaty on climate change. The treaty committed its parties to the important, if awkwardly worded goal of preventing "dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system." In acknowledgment of the fact that America and its allies were largely responsible for the problem, the pact set a different standard for them; Europe, Japan, Australia, and the United States were supposed to "take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof." Signing the instrument of ratification for the treaty, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, President George H. W. Bush noted the special responsibilities that the developed nations were taking on; they "must go further" than the others, he said, and offer detailed "programs and measures they will undertake to limit greenhouse emissions."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The convention remains in effect, and for the past seventeen years the United States has insisted that it is living up to its terms. Under Bill Clinton, this claim was implausible; the U.S. took no meaningful action to reduce its emissions. Under George W. Bush, it became a bad joke. (When the Bush Administration wasn't handing out tax breaks to fossil-fuel companies, it was muzzling climate scientists and storming out of international negotiations.) The election of Barack Obama seemed in this, as in so many other areas, to offer a fresh start. A few weeks after his victory, Obama vowed to open a "new chapter" on climate change. And yet, almost a year later, the United States is again—or, really, still—stuck in the same old pattern. We keep saying that we want to be marching at the front of the parade, and then hanging back with the tubas.

Last week at the United Nations, at what was billed as the highest-level meeting on climate change ever, there was general agreement about the approaching disaster. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned that rising temperatures would "increase pressure on water, food, and land; reverse years of development gains; exacerbate poverty; destabilize fragile states; and topple governments." President Oscar Arias Sánchez, of Costa Rica, described the session as taking place "on the brink of a precipice for our planet." President Nicolas Sarkozy, of France, stated, "We are the very last generation that can take action."



"If things go business as usual, we will not live," President Mohamed Nasheed, of the low-lying Maldives, told the assembled delegates. "We will die. Our country will not exist."

President Obama, too, was apocalyptic. "We risk consigning future generations to an irreversible catastrophe," he said in the first of three U.N. addresses. He went on to list the various steps that his Administration has taken—setting new automobile-efficiency standards, investing billions of dollars in weatherizing homes and office buildings, establishing reporting rules for the nation's largest greenhouse-gas emitters. "The developed nations that caused much of the damage to our climate over the last century still have a responsibility to lead," he said, before adding, unconvincingly, "And we will continue to do so."

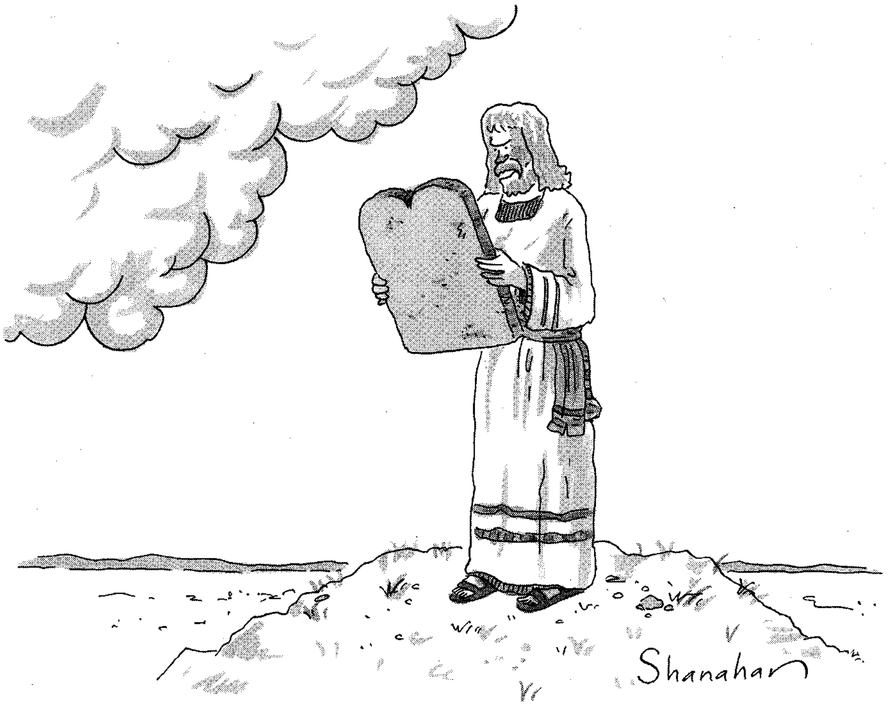
What would it take for the United States actually to show leadership, instead of just talking about it? First, it would have to impose binding emissions limits of the sort that it has spent the last two decades evading. The Europeans, who are already operating under such constraints, have pledged to cut their emissions by twenty per cent by 2020, and have said that they would agree to a thirty-per-cent cut if other nations followed suit. The new Japanese Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama, has committed his country to cutting its emissions by twenty-five per cent. In the United States, a bill that would reduce emissions by seventeen per cent narrowly passed the House in June, only to become bogged down in the Senate; it is unclear if the bill will reach the Senate floor this year, or, if so, whether it has the votes to pass. (The United States is using a baseline year of 2005, while the Europeans and the Japanese are using 1990, which means that the proposed American cuts are significantly more modest than they sound.)

Meanwhile, a crucial deadline approaches. In December, many of the same players who met in New York last week will travel to Copenhagen to try to hash out a new international climate agreement. In contrast to the Kyoto Protocol, which was designed as a sort of warmup exercise (and which the United States never agreed to), this new treaty is supposed to be the real thing: a pact strong enough to avert, as Obama put it, "irreversible catastrophe." Both China and India, which have long resisted emissions targets, have recently signalled a willingness to make a deal. If the American team shows up in Copenhagen with nothing to offer, though, it's hard to imagine how such a deal could be struck. (Although China recently overtook the U.S. as the world's largest CO_2 producer on an annual basis, the U.S. remains far and away the largest source of cumulative emissions in the atmosphere.) As John Bruton, the European Union's Ambassador to Washington, observed recently in the London *Telegraph*, "Is the U.S. Senate really expecting all the other countries to make a serious effort on climate change at the Copenhagen conference in the absence of a clear commitment from the United States?"

There is no reason to doubt Obama's sincerity about climate change. In addition to the actions he mentioned at the U.N., his Administration has, most significantly, classified carbon dioxide as a pollutant, a move that could eventually lead to its regulation under the Clean Air Act. And the President is clearly frustrated by the stalemate in the Senate. But at this late date sincerity is not enough. When the President proposed that Congress take up a climate bill along with health-care legislation and, on top of that, regulatory reform, he made an enormous gamble. This gamble, at some point, could have been called bold; increasingly, it just seems naïve.

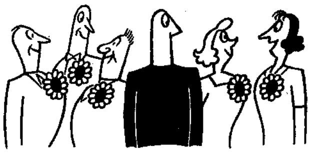
For the world to avoid "dangerous anthropogenic interference," the United States is, finally, going to have to live up to the commitments it made under the Framework Convention. And, in order for this to happen, Obama is going to have to move climate change to the top of his agenda—quickly. As the President himself put it last week, "The time we have to reverse this tide is running out."

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*



"Who did the damn crossword?"

FLAIR DEPT.
BIG PIN



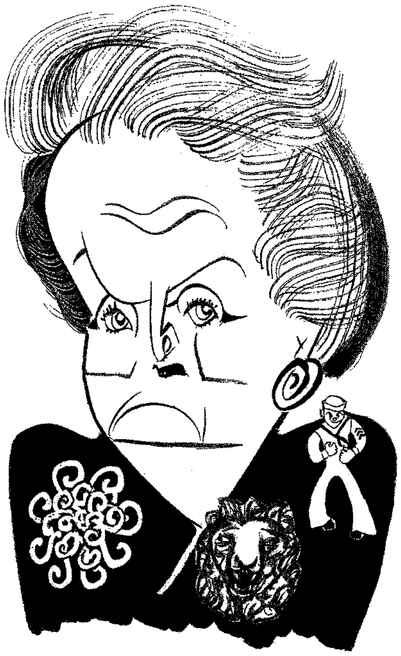
People who wear pins do so for various reasons: to look nice (Queen Elizabeth, débutantes), to identify themselves (fraternity pledges, Realtors), to convey enthusiasms (Trekkies, conventioneers), to get fired up (T.G.I. Friday's employees). At least since the days of George Washington, who sometimes wore a diamond eagle given to him by the French Navy, political pin-wearing—all those enamel flags!—has been its own discipline. Perhaps its most committed exponent is Madeleine Albright, who as Secretary of State became known for using a repertoire of brooches to signal, or to sway, the diplomatic mood. A stalled negotiation might have elicited from her jewelry box a turtle in lapis lazuli; a friendly summit, the dandelion with a moonstone for its puff; a contentious encounter, a rhinestone bee or a copper-pincered crab. In an introductory essay to Albright's latest book, "Read My Pins," David Revere McFadden, the chief curator of the Museum of Arts and Design, which is mounting an accompanying exhibition, appraises Albright's pins as "gentle implements of statecraft"—cloisonné carrots and sterling-silver sticks.

"God, this Native American stuff looks fabulous!" Albright said last week.

She was at the museum, standing in front of a display case containing a howlite-and-turquoise sunburst, given to her by the former Arizona governors Rose Mofford and Janet Napolitano. Albright was wearing a black suit, but who really cared, when stuck to her right lapel was a gleaming gold-plated sunflower pin, dusted with pale-yellow rhinestones, like pollen. ("It seemed like a good way to celebrate the sun," she said.) Albright has some valuable pieces—a Verdura poppy, a Calderesque constellation of cabochons, tourmalines, and aquamarines from Cartier—and some heirlooms—her mother's three-circle pin, her ex-husband's Theta Delta Xi pin. (Her father congratulated him for "pinning Madeleine down.") But mostly the collection consists of costume jewelry, acquired in souks and airport shops around the world. "I do poke around in antique stores," Albright said. "I have a pretty good eye. This sounds crazy, but I'll look at a counter of things, and something says, 'You need me.' "

Albright got started with pins after the Gulf War. She was the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and she had angered Saddam Hussein by criticizing his refusal to coöperate with weapons inspectors. A poem appeared in the Iraqi press—"Albright, Albright, all right, all right, you are the worst in this night"—which called Albright an "unparalleled serpent." Albright recalled, "I had this snake pin, so I thought it would be really fun to wear it when we did Iraq things." She pointed it out, behind the glass: an antique eighteen-carat-gold branch, around which was coiled a snake, a diamond dangling from its mouth. The pin was a hit. Albright bought some more. When she and the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, negotiated an anti-ballistics treaty, she wore a four-inch interceptor missile. ("I said, 'We make them very small.' ") For a meeting with Yasser Arafat, she chose a bee. (He sent her a butterfly.) Over the years, she has acquired hearts, mosquitoes, fleurs-de-lis, gingko leaves, angels, zebras, stars, moons, panthers, dragonflies, a shattered glass ceiling, and a rocket-propelled-grenade launcher. A typical caption from the book reads, "Processing to Palm Sunday services in Tobago, April 1998. I didn't have a donkey or a burro pin for the occasion, so I wore my circular horse."

The pin book is, like Albright, surprisingly funny—she considers her pins good accessories for someone who has been mistaken, over the years, for "Margaret Thatcher, Barbara Bush, Judi Dench, Helen Thomas, some nice young fellow's Aunt Agatha, and the television weather lady in Minneapolis." As for "the Hooters issue," her solution has been to wear them, she writes, "higher and higher up." Passing by a cluster of bug pins ("My spiders!"), she reminisced about the fruits and vegetables—"I said that peace talks, like mushrooms, sometimes do better in the dark"—before pausing near some transportation-themed baubles. "The hot-air balloons I wore on happy days," she said. "In foreign policy, you're always asked whether you're an idealist or a realist. And I have always said, mainly because I can't make up my mind, that I'm an idealistic realist or a realistic idealist. And that foreign policy is a lot like a hot-air balloon—you need the helium to get it up, and you need the ballast to give it direction."



Madeleine Albright

Soon, she was on to a display of diplomatic-gift pins. "This is the lion that Robin Cook"—the former British Foreign Secretary—"gave me." She pointed to a photograph of herself with Cook, in which she is wearing a gold-plated Judith Leiber number the size of a door knocker. "God, I was fat!" Albright said. Tracing the glass with a finger, she settled upon another lion. She said that she had worn it for the former Syrian President Hafez al-Assad—*Assad* means "lion"—and that she had got it at her hairdresser's, or somewhere.

—*Lauren Collins*

PARKS DEPT.
LONE RANGER

While channel-surfing recently, Shelton Johnson came across the 1996 thriller "Broken Arrow," about nuclear missiles let loose over the Utah canyons, and was reminded of a story he had heard: that Halle Berry was originally in the running for one of the movie's supporting roles, as a park ranger. "But the studio executive said, 'There's no such thing as a black ranger,' " Johnson recalled last week. He was on a boat in New York Harbor, dressed in his olive-green ranger uniform, complete with Smokey-the-Bear Stetson. Johnson, who is black, works at Yosemite National Park as an "interpreter," teaching about the buffalo soldiers of the Ninth Cavalry, who patrolled Yosemite at the turn of the past century. He had come to town for the première of Ken Burns's new twelve-hour epic, "The National Parks," on PBS, in which he plays a supporting role as himself.

"People have been staring at me since I've been here," Johnson said, disembarking at Ellis Island, which is operated by the National Park Service. "But I think it's just the uniform." He said hello to the first ranger he encountered, another African-American, named Larry, who wasn't wearing a Stetson. A second ranger—also African-American, also hatless—greeted Johnson next. His name was Daniel, and he led Johnson to a boat bound for Liberty Island. "I understand you were pretty interested in New York—Grant's Tomb and all that?" Daniel said.

Johnson was born in Detroit, and lived in Germany and England as a young boy. ("I was in London when the Beatles were just getting big.") This was his first trip to the city. "I've always been interested in New York, because it's the cultural capital of America," he said.

"And everything started in the East," Daniel said. "That's what I was trying to tell the big parks in the West: 'Everything started in the East.' " Johnson was travelling with an escort, who wore a "National Parks" fleece that Daniel eyed enviously. "Ken Burns is going all out," Daniel said. "He got L.L. Bean shirts and stuff."

On Liberty Island, Daniel handed Johnson off to another ranger, named Gene, whose ancestors were Ukrainian. "Unfortunately, the elevator's not working," Gene said. "We had a small fire a couple of weeks ago. So it's all stairs today." They passed through a metal detector and started climbing the interior of the Statue of Liberty. After five or six flights, Gene became short of breath. "This is the New York version of Half Dome," he said. The rangers stopped at the pedestal, about midway up, to take in the view.

"Let your eyes readjust," Gene said, as though entering a cave, before leading Johnson back down to the museum and out through a "secret exit," into a vaulted brick sally port, a remnant of the old Fort Wood. "I wish I'd brought my flute, because this has a great echo," Johnson said. Gene then led Johnson back toward the dock, through a flock of seagulls—New York's falcons. "You stand here long enough, you'll witness them snatch a hot dog out of someone's hand," Gene said. "I had a visitor, one year, come into the first-aid room bleeding from the head. I said, 'Sir, what happened?' 'A crab, it fell from the sky!' "

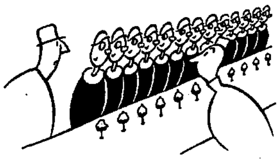
Waves of Catholic-school girls and retirees, or "gray panthers," as rangers call them, were descending the gangplank of a ferry from New Jersey. "Goodness, how many people does this hold?" Johnson asked. "It's like Noah's Ark." Ellis and Liberty Islands, combined, could fit into a single mountain pass, but they receive about the same number of visitors annually—roughly 3.5 million—as Yosemite or Yellowstone.

Johnson reminisced about surprising a sow grizzly bear and her two cubs, and before long it was time to head back to Manhattan. "People actually think that I'm the only African-American ranger," he said. "But we saw a few today." What concerns him is the tourists. In the nineties, Johnson was stationed at Great Basin National Park, near the Nevada-Utah border—"Broken Arrow" territory—and he went a year and a half without seeing another black face. "I've been trying to get through to Oprah Winfrey," he said. "I would love her to do a show from Glacier Point, with the subject matter being the cultural diversity of national parks." Johnson's publisher had just sent Winfrey a copy of his first novel, "Gloryland," about a flute-playing buffalo soldier. He got off at Battery Park and was soon approached by a woman looking for directions to the British Memorial Garden, for victims of 9/11. "Oh, I'm from Yosemite," he said.

—*Ben McGrath*

THE PICTURES

SCOUSERS



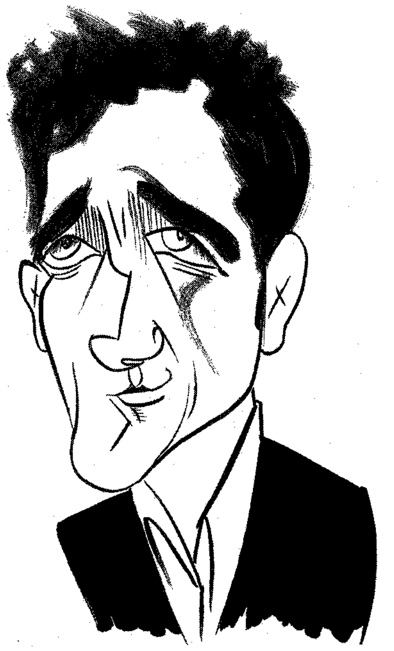
Clive Owen fans fall into a few categories. There are those (largely female) who like Owen for his looks. Then there are others (mostly male) who like his grizzled demeanor as an action hero in movies like "The International" and "Children of Men." He seems rough around the edges compared with the Hugh Grants and Tom Cruises of the world ("kind of shady," a male fan said, admiringly, of his performance in "Closer"). A new type of Clive Owen appreciator came to light last week: fans who like Owen primarily because he, too, loves Liverpool football. "They're soccer fans," Owen explained, translating for an American at the sports bar Nevada Smiths, on Third Avenue (motto: "Where Football Is Religion"). He was surrounded by about fifty boozy soccer fans, who stood beneath flat-screen TVs showing the Leeds United vs. Liverpool game, singing "You'll Never Walk Alone," the Liverpool anthem. For them, Clive Owen is not religion. "People will come up and ask for your autograph or whatever," he said, "but the priority is the game."

It was four-fifteen on a Tuesday. Owen was drinking a rum-and-coke, and he wore a black suit and a white cotton shirt, open at the collar. On the screen, his neck seems a little thick—a fullback's physique—but in person he resembles a lean, eager midfielder. He was in town to promote his new film, "The Boys Are Back," in which he plays a father whose wife dies, leaving him to raise two boys alone. The story is based on a memoir by the British political columnist Simon Carr, but in the film Owen's character is a sportswriter. "Being a sportswriter came quite naturally," Owen said. "I mean, when it comes to football I think I'd be all right. I read the *Guardian*." Owen grew up in Coventry, but he has always loved Liverpool soccer, which is like being a Yankees fan from Portsmouth, New Hampshire. "They were the glamour team," he said. "David Bowie and Liverpool Football Club. Those were the only autographs I have ever been sending off for." He used to watch games in secret. "My ritual was I'd go upstairs, put a full kit on, and watch TV." Now his assistant puts all the Liverpool games on his schedule.

One of the soccer fans, a ruddy-faced man with a thick, curly head of gray hair, approached and asked, in a booming voice, "What was it like snogging Julia Roberts?"

"Great!" Owen said, uneasily.

The fan went on to praise "Duplicity"—"Everything in the film's so current"—and Roberts some more: "Seriously, I love her."



Clive Owen

But Owen was back on athletics. He has two minor obsessions: "I'm very into horse racing" ("Sea the Stars, from Ireland, is proving to be the best horse that's come around in a while"), and, he added, "I do love tennis." He's a Nadal fan. He saw Roddick in the semifinals at Wimbledon: "I get to the match a good two hours before the game to avoid the traffic." He's not big on American sports, but he once

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went to a Knicks game with Spike Lee, who was wooing him for "Inside Man." "You wouldn't believe how involved Spike was," Owen said. "It was like he was a part of the game, sitting in the front row, talking to the players."

Owen does not dream of being a soccer player, or a sportswriter ("A guy who writes the games up—it's just one guy's take"); but a manager, that's tempting. "To be involved in the high end of footballing in any capacity, and spend your life going to amazing games, would be incredible," he said. In Namibia, while shooting "Beyond Borders," Owen caught a Liverpool game on a TV in the middle of the desert ("They managed to get a wire out to my tent, so we had cable"); in Milan, for "Duplicity," he squeezed in an Inter Milan Champions League game, and afterward, in the locker room, met Zlatan Ibrahimović, who gave him his jersey. In Thailand (for "Beyond Borders" again), Owen's driver turned out to be a Man U supporter. "He couldn't afford cable," Owen said. "In Thailand, soccer games air at 3 or 4 A.M., but I let him come to my place and watch the games. I said, 'You can watch it, but don't wake me up.' "

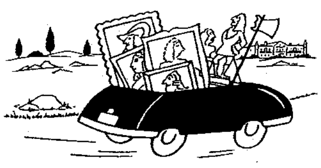
Deep into the second half of the Liverpool game, the TV screens went blank: Nevada Smiths had lost its satellite signal. The fans seemed dazed. A guy in a red Skrtel jersey turned to Owen to introduce himself. "Have we formally met?" he asked. "I'm Dwayne." Owen stuck out his hand: "Clive Owen."

Only two women approached. One, wearing a Calvin Klein sweatshirt, said, "Excuse me. Can I take your picture?"

Owen agreed, but after the picture was taken she confessed to being a Leeds fan: "I hope Liverpool loses. Sorry."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

WINDFALLS
MR. MOMA



Glenn Lowry, the director of the Museum of Modern Art, has a summer house on Lake Memphremagog, in northern Vermont. The area is part of what Vermonters call the Northeast Kingdom, and people who live there are proud of its frigid winters, frugal economy, and low population density. Two years ago, when Lowry heard that a man named Michael H. Dunn, from the town of Derby, just across the lake from him, had dropped dead of a heart attack, and that his estate, in excess of ten million dollars, had been left to MOMA, he was flabbergasted. "I'd cycled past his house, but I had no clue who he was," Lowry said the other day.

The gift, which now stands at ten and a half million dollars but may end up being considerably larger, was announced a couple of weeks ago in a low-key ceremony at the museum, outside a second-floor gallery that had Dunn's name on the wall. Many people in Derby are still unaware that Dunn gave everything he had to the museum, or that he had so much to give. "I think very few people realized what he was worth," said Steven Marsh, the president and C.E.O. of Derby's Community National Bank (and Dunn's good friend), who came down to New York for the event. "About ten years ago, he told me that he was leaving his money to a museum of art, but he didn't say which one."

Totally unexpected gifts to museums are rare enough—MOMA has never received one anywhere near this large—but not unheard of. Jacob S. Rogers's out-of-the-blue five-million-dollar bequest to the Metropolitan, in 1903, transformed it from a struggling institution into an art-world colossus. Known as the meanest man in Paterson, New Jersey, Rogers manufactured locomotives, and his largesse seems to have been motivated, in part, at least, by a desire to stick it to his hopeful heirs. Dunn, like Rogers, was a lifelong bachelor and a low-level member of the museum he chose to enrich, but the resemblance stops there. In Derby, Dunn is remembered as a convivial, gregarious fellow who served as a town selectman, and was a fixture on the boards of the hospital, the bank, and several local charities.

Born and raised in Montreal, the only child of a well-to-do family, Dunn had become a stockbroker, and increased the family fortune through shrewd investments. In 1976, two years after the separatist Parti Québécois came to power, Dunn and his mother, uneasy about their status as English-speakers, moved to a property that Dunn's grandmother had bought as a vacation home, just across the Canadian border in Vermont. Dunn, who was thirty-six at the time of the move, became a rare-book dealer, but he didn't have to work. His main interest, aside from community service, lay in building his collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Canadian paintings—it eventually numbered more than three hundred works. He also collected duck decoys and antique watches.

Dunn lived simply, all alone in the ramshackle house after his mother's death, cooking for himself and occasionally for friends—his specialty was seafood bisque. He liked to shop at Wal-Mart, whose stock he had invested in early, and at Costco, where he bought his wine. He wore khakis and sports shirts, and drove around town in a Volkswagen Passat. For the past ten years, he'd had a lady friend, who worked in the U.S. customs office at the border, but they didn't live together. Although Dunn spent most of his time in Derby, he travelled a lot—to New York City for the Westminster Kennel Club dog show, to Switzerland and Germany for the watch fairs. (He was in Zurich, en route to a watch fair, when he died, at the age of sixty-five.) His godson, Michael Hickox, accompanied him on several of his New York visits. "He travelled economy," Hickox recalled. "He was a big jazz fan, and he loved to go to good restaurants, but he stayed in the Hotel Edison, near Times Square, where he could get a room for a hundred and twenty dollars a night. One time, he wanted to buy a suit. We went upstairs in some nondescript building on Fifth Avenue, one of those places that had someone standing outside with a sandwich board, and he bought a suit for a hundred and ninety dollars, which he wore with a pair of John Lobb shoes he'd bought in London for a thousand dollars or more. Michael cared about shoes, but not about suits."

Hickox feels that if Dunn had lived longer he might have amended his will to include some of his friends in Derby. But no one is contesting the will, and the gift to MOMA came with no restrictions. "He got out of the stock market before the recession, thank God, so those are real dollars," Lowry said. "We'll use some of it for acquisitions, but most of it will go to build up our endowment. And we're told that there is more coming."

—*Calvin Tomkins*

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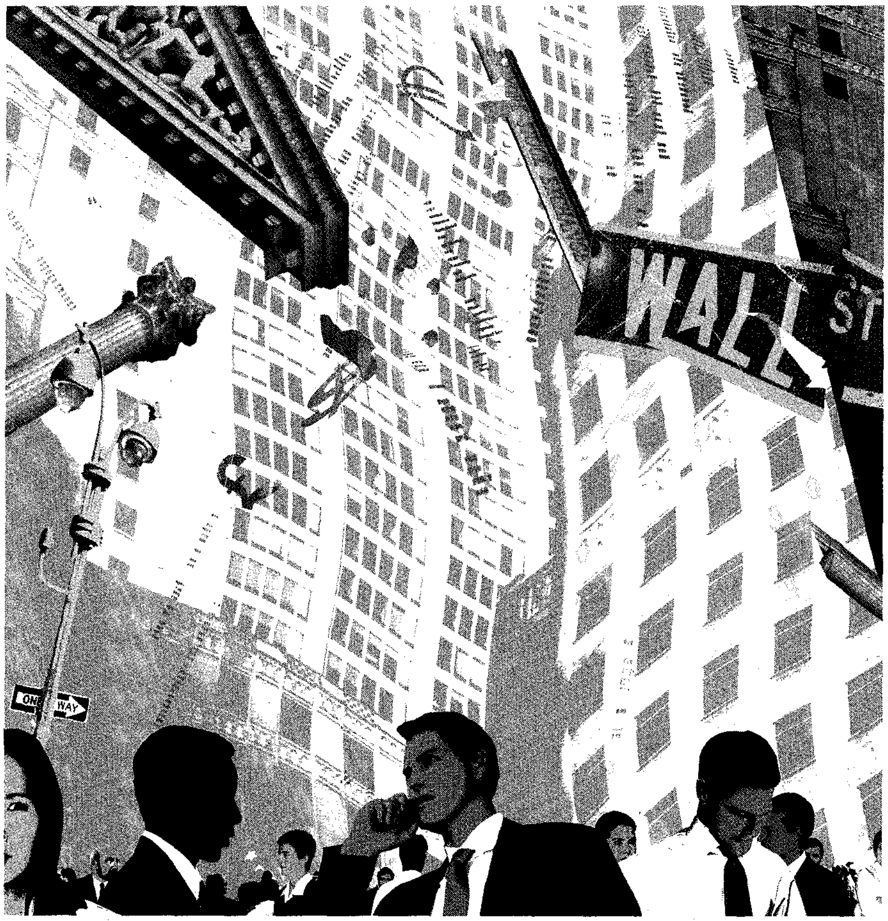
ANNALS OF ECONOMICS

RATIONAL IRRATIONALITY

The real reason that capitalism is so crash-prone.

BY JOHN CASSIDY



In finance, actions can be both individually prudent and collectively disastrous.

JOHN RITTER

On June 10, 2000, Queen Elizabeth II opened the high-tech Millennium Bridge, which traverses the River Thames from the Tate Modern to St. Paul's Cathedral. Thousands of people lined up to walk across the new structure, which consisted of a narrow aluminum footbridge surrounded by steel balustrades projecting out at obtuse angles. Within minutes of the official opening, the footway started to tilt and sway alarmingly, forcing some of the pedestrians to cling to the side rails. Some reported feeling seasick. The authorities shut the bridge, claiming that too many people were using it. The next day, the bridge reopened with strict limits on the number of pedestrians, but it began to shake again. Two days after it had opened, with the source of the wobble still a mystery, the bridge was closed for an indefinite period.

Some commentators suspected the bridge's foundations, others an unusual air pattern. The real problem was that the designers of the bridge, who included the architect Sir Norman Foster and the engineering firm Ove Arup, had not taken into account how the footway would react to all the pedestrians walking on it. When a person walks, lifting and dropping each foot in turn, he or she produces a slight sideways force. If hundreds of people are walking in a confined space, and some happen to walk in step, they can generate enough lateral momentum to move a footbridge—just a little. Once the footway starts swaying, however subtly, more and more pedestrians adjust their gait to get comfortable, stepping to and fro in synch. As a positive-feedback loop develops between the bridge's swing and the pedestrians' stride, the sideways forces can increase dramatically and the bridge can lurch violently. The investigating engineers termed this process "synchronous lateral excitation," and came up with a mathematical formula to describe it.

What does all this have to do with financial markets? Quite a lot, as the Princeton economist Hyun Song Shin pointed out in a prescient 2005 paper. Most of the time, financial markets are pretty calm, trading is orderly, and participants can buy and sell in large quantities. Whenever a crisis hits, however, the biggest players—banks, investment banks, hedge funds—rush to reduce their exposure, buyers disappear, and liquidity dries up. Where previously there were diverse views, now there is unanimity: everybody's moving in lockstep. "The pedestrians on the bridge are like banks adjusting their stance and the movements of the bridge itself are like price changes," Shin wrote. And the process is self-reinforcing: once liquidity falls below a certain threshold, "all the elements that formed a virtuous circle to promote stability now will conspire to undermine it." The financial markets can become highly unstable.

This is essentially what happened in the lead-up to the Great Crunch. The trigger was, of course, the market for subprime-mortgage bonds—bonds backed by the monthly payments from pools of loans that had been made to poor and middle-income home buyers. In August, 2007, with house prices falling and mortgage delinquencies rising, the market for subprime securities froze. By itself, this shouldn't have caused too many problems: the entire stock of outstanding subprime mortgages was about a trillion dollars, a figure dwarfed by nearly twelve trillion dollars in total outstanding mortgages, not to mention the eighteen-trillion-dollar value of the stock market. But then banks, which couldn't estimate how much exposure other firms had to losses, started to pull back credit lines and hoard their capital—and they did so en masse, confirming Shin's point about the market imposing uniformity. An immediate collapse was averted when the European

Central Bank and the Fed announced that they would pump more money into the financial system. Still, the global economic crisis didn't ease up until early this year, and by then governments had committed an estimated nine trillion dollars to propping up the system.

A number of explanations have been proposed for the great boom and bust, most of which focus on greed, overconfidence, and downright stupidity on the part of mortgage lenders, investment bankers, and Wall Street C.E.O.s. According to a common narrative, we have lived through a textbook instance of the madness of crowds. If this were all there was to it, we could rest more comfortably: greed can be controlled, with some difficulty, admittedly; overconfidence gets punctured; even stupid people can be educated. Unfortunately, the real causes of the crisis are much scarier and less amenable to reform: they have to do with the inner logic of an economy like ours. The root problem is what might be termed "rational irrationality"—behavior that, on the individual level, is perfectly reasonable but that, when aggregated in the marketplace, produces calamity.

Consider the freeze that started in August of 2007. Each bank was adopting a prudent course by turning away questionable borrowers and holding on to its capital. But the results were mutually ruinous: once credit stopped flowing, many financial firms—the banks included—were forced to sell off assets in order to raise cash. This round of selling caused stocks, bonds, and other assets to decline in value, which generated a new round of losses.

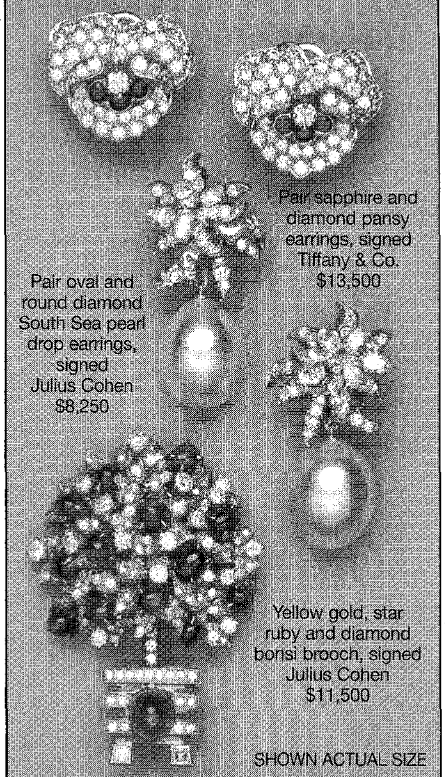
A similar feedback loop was at work during the boom stage of the cycle, when many mortgage companies extended home loans to low- and middle-income applicants who couldn't afford to repay them. In hindsight, that looks like reckless lending. It didn't at the time. In most cases, lenders had no intention of holding on to the mortgages they issued. After taking a generous fee for originating the loans, they planned to sell them to Wall Street banks, such as Merrill Lynch and Goldman Sachs, which were in the business of pooling mortgages and using the monthly payments they generated to issue mortgage bonds. When a borrower whose home loan has been "securitized" in this way defaults on his payments, it is the buyer of the mortgage bond who suffers a loss, not the issuer of the mortgage.

This was the climate that produced business successes like New Century Financial Corporation, of Orange County, which originated $51.6 billion in subprime mortgages in 2006, making it the second-largest subprime lender in the United States, and which filed for Chapter 11 on April 2, 2007. More than forty per cent of the loans it issued were stated-income loans, also known as liar loans, which didn't require applicants to provide documentation of their supposed earnings. Michael J. Missal, a bankruptcy-court examiner who carried out a detailed inquiry into New Century's business, quoted a chief credit officer who said that the company had "no standard for loan quality." Some employees queried its lax approach to lending, without effect. Senior management's primary concern was that the loans it originated could be sold to Wall Street. As long as investors were eager to buy subprime securities, with few questions asked, expanding credit recklessly was a highly rewarding strategy.

When the subprime-mortgage market faltered, the business model of giving loans to all comers no longer made sense. Nobody wanted mortgage-backed securities any longer; nobody wanted to buy the underlying mortgages. Some of the Wall Street firms that had financed New Century's operations, such as Goldman Sachs and Citigroup, made margin calls. Federal investigators began looking into New Century's accounts, and the company rapidly became one of the first major casualties of the subprime crisis. Then again, New Century's executives were hardly the only ones who failed to predict the subprime crash; Alan Greenspan and Ben Bernanke didn't, either. Sharp-dealing companies like New Century may have been reprehensible. But they weren't simply irrational.

The same logic applies to the decisions made by Wall Street C.E.O.s like Citigroup's Charles Prince and Merrill Lynch's Stanley O'Neal. They've been roundly denounced for leading their companies into the mortgage business, where they suffered heavy losses. In the midst of a credit bubble, though, somebody running a big financial institution seldom has the option of sitting it out. What boosts a firm's stock price, and the boss's standing,

Fine Estate Jewelry
(yellow gold and platinum, c. 1980)



Pair sapphire and diamond pansy earrings, signed Tiffany & Co. $13,500

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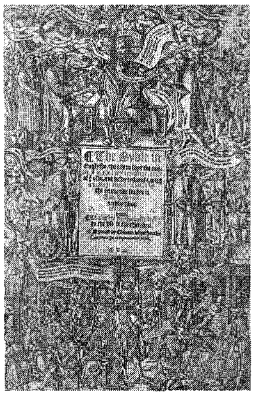

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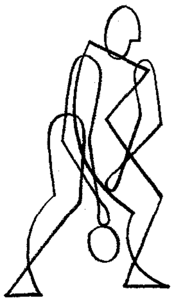
is a rapid expansion in revenues and market share. Privately, he may harbor reservations about a particular business line, such as subprime securitization. But, once his peers have entered the field, and are making money, his firm has little choice except to join them. C.E.O.s certainly don't have much personal incentive to exercise caution. Most of them receive compensation packages loaded with stock options, which reward them for delivering extraordinary growth rather than for maintaining product quality and protecting their firm's reputation.



Prince's experience at Citigroup provides an illuminating case study. A corporate lawyer by profession, he had risen to prominence as the legal adviser to Citigroup's creator, Sandy Weill. After Weill got caught up in Eliot Spitzer's investigation of Wall Street analysts and resigned, in 2003, Prince took over as C.E.O. He was under pressure to boost Citigroup's investment-banking division, which was widely perceived to be falling behind its competitors. At the start of 2005, Citigroup's board reportedly asked Prince and his colleagues to develop a growth strategy for the bank's bond business. Robert Rubin, the former Treasury Secretary, who served as the chairman of the board's executive committee, advised Prince that the company could take on more risk. "We could afford to seek more opportunities through intelligent risk-taking," Rubin later told the *Times*. "The key word is 'intelligent.'"

Prince could have rejected Rubin's advice and told the board that he didn't think it was a good idea for Citigroup to take on more risk, however intelligently it was done. But Citigroup's stock price hadn't moved much in five years, and maintaining a cautious approach would have involved forgoing the kind of growth that some of the firm's rivals—UBS and Bank of America—were already enjoying. To somebody in Prince's position, the risky choice would have been standing aloof from the subprime craze, not joining the crowd.

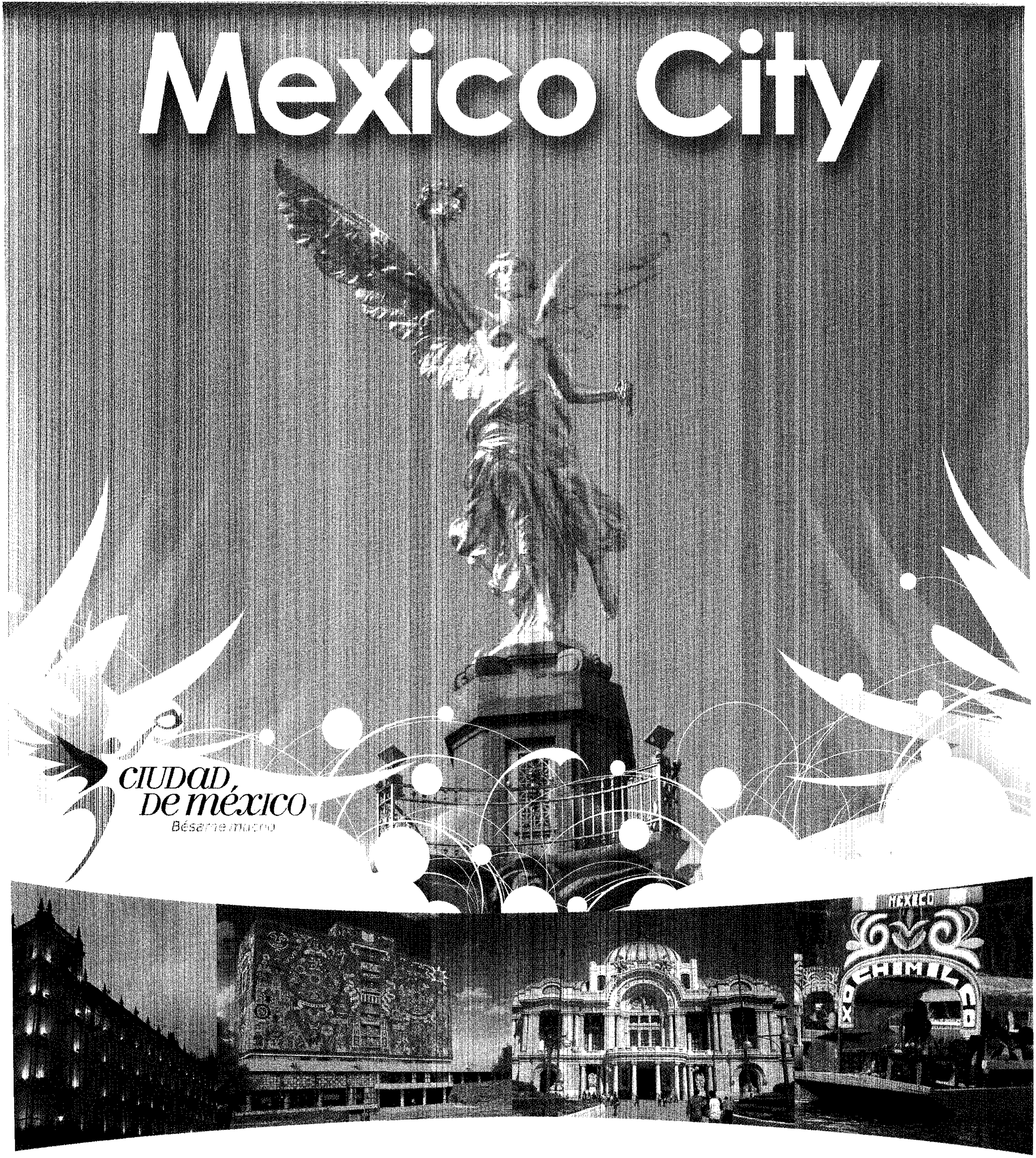
In July, 2007, he intimated as much, in an interview with the *Financial Times*. At that stage, three months after New Century's collapse, the problems in the subprime market could no longer be ignored. But the private-equity business, in which Citigroup had become a major presence, was still thriving, and Blackstone, one of the biggest buyout firms, had just issued stock on the New York Stock Exchange. Prince conceded that a collapse in the credit markets could leave Citigroup and other banks exposed to the prospect of large losses. Despite the danger, he insisted that he had no intention of pulling back. "When the music stops, in terms of liquidity, things will be complicated," Prince said. "But as long as the music is playing, you've got to get up and dance."

The reference to the game of musical chairs was a remarkably candid description of the situation in which executives like Prince found themselves, and of the logic of rational irrationality. Whether Prince knew it or not, he was channelling John Maynard Keynes, who, in "The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money," pointed to the inconvenient fact that "there is no such thing as liquidity of investment for the community as a whole." Whatever the asset class may be—stocks, bonds, real estate, or commodities—the market will seize up if everybody tries to sell at the same time. Financiers were accordingly obliged to keep a close eye on the "mass psychology of the market," which could change at any moment. Keynes wrote, "It is, so to speak, a game of Snap, of Old Maid, of Musical Chairs—a pastime in which he is victor who says *Snap* neither too soon nor too late, who passes the Old Maid to his neighbour before the game is over, who secures a chair for himself when the music stops."

Keynes's jaundiced view of finance reflected his own experience as an investor and as a director of an insurance company. Every morning, in his rooms at King's College, Cambridge, he spent about half an hour in bed studying the financial pages and various brokerage reports. He compared investing to newspaper competitions in which "the competitors have to pick out the six prettiest faces from a hundred photographs, the prize being awarded to the competitor whose choice most nearly corresponds to the average preferences of the competitors as a whole; so that each competitor has to pick, not those faces which he himself finds prettiest, but those which he thinks likeliest to catch the fancy of the other competitors, all of whom are looking at the problem from the same point of view." If you want to win such a contest, you'd better try to select the outcome on which others will converge, whatever your personal opinion might be. "It is not a case of choosing those which, to the best of one's judgment, are really the prettiest, nor even those which average opinion genuinely thinks the prettiest," Keynes explained. "We have reached the third degree, where we devote our intelligences to anticipating what average opinion expects the average opinion to be. And there are some, I believe, who practice the fourth, fifth and higher degrees."

The beauty-contest analogy helps explain why real-estate developers, condo flippers, and financial investors continued to invest in the real-estate market and in the mortgage-securities market, even though many of them may have believed that home prices had risen too far. Alan Greenspan and other free-market economists failed to recognize that, during a speculative mania, attempting to "surf" the bubble can be a perfectly rational strategy. According to orthodox economics, professional speculators play a stabilizing role in the financial markets: whenever prices rise above fundamentals, they step in and sell; whenever prices fall too far, they step in and buy. But history has demonstrated that much of the so-called "smart money" aims at getting in ahead of the crowd, and that only adds to the mispricing.

Markus Brunnermeier, an economist at Princeton, and Stefan Nagel, an economist at Stanford, obtained data from S.E.C. filings for fifty-three hedge-fund managers during the dot-com bubble. In the third quarter of 1999, they discovered, the funds raised their portfolio weightings in technology stocks from sixteen to twenty-nine per cent. By March of 2000, when the Nasdaq peaked, the funds had invested roughly a third of their assets in tech. "From an efficient-markets perspective, these results are puzzling," Brunnermeier and Nagel noted. "Why would some of the most sophisticated investors in the market hold these overpriced technology stocks?" We know that many such investors had no illusions about the prospects of the financial products they traded. But their strategy was to capture the up-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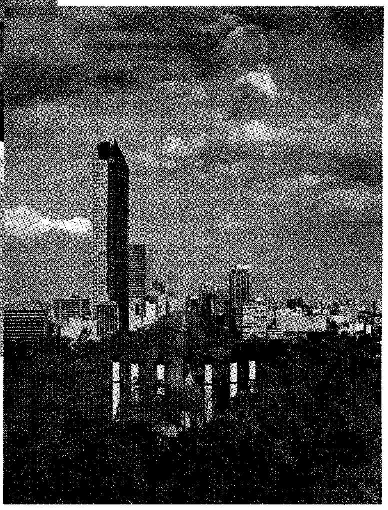
Art and cuisine have always been a fundamental part of Mexico's culture—and nowhere more so than in Mexico City. An important resource for contemporary art is the Museo de Arte Moderno: the renowned Pujol (below) offers gourmets an artful contemporary spin on street food. Inset, Chapultepec Park and skyline.



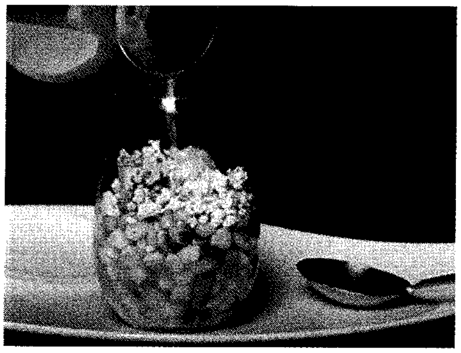
Mexico City

Art Is Everywhere

THE NEWS OF THE ART WORLD is the recent opening of the **Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo**, which has given Mexico's largest collection of post-fifties art a dramatic home designed by Teodoro González de León. It enhances with appropriate scope and depth Mexico City's already rich roster of more than a hundred and twenty museums—second only to Paris in number.

Visit the **Museo Nacional de Antropología** in Chapultepec Park; its Maya and Aztec sculptures present pre-Hispanic cultures with profound impact. The park's **Museo de Arte Moderno** is renowned for references to the pre-Hispanic art that informs the work of such twentieth-century masters as Rufino Tamayo and Gerardo Murillo.

Mexico City's historic center offers the opportunity to view great art within charming old architecture. The **Museo Nacional de Arte** welcomes you into a 1911 neoclassical landmark filled with nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings and sculpture. The colonial courtyards of **Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso** boast the bold murals of the realist painter José Clemente Orozco. The walls of the sixteenth-century **Palacio Nacional** hold Diego Rivera's saga of Mexican history painted in the nineteen-thirties.



Like its museums, Mexico City's cuisine has won seismic international acclaim, with U.S. media recently calling it a contender for the title of world's best. Connoisseurs are drawn to beloved taquerias in Condesa, Coyoacán, and other neighborhoods. But one of the most sought-after reservations in town is at **Pujol**, where Chef Enrique Olvera brings fashionable reinvention and the finest quality local ingredients to such street food as tacos and tamales. Although he uses some avant-garde techniques, he claims it's a challenge to change the basics "because the traditional preparations are so good." Other eateries acclaimed for fresh takes on the classics include **Izote**, where Chef Patricia Quintana tempts diners with lobster-filled tortillas; **Águila y Sol**, known for the regional fare prepared by Chef Martha Ortiz; and the trend-setting **La Taberna del León** and **Náos** of French-trained chef Mónica Patiño. When celebrity chefs from other countries come here they head for the more rustic, but no less refined, barbecue-centric cooking of Carmen Ramírez Degollado at **El Bajío**.

The artistic recreation of such simple fare as bean tamales draws the cognoscenti to Chef Ricardo Muñoz Zurita's restaurant, **Azul y Oro**, located on the campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México across from the new contemporary art museum. If you come to savor both around the **Dia de los Muertos**, November 1st and 2nd, you'll also encounter wildly creative versions of ritual in the university's competitive exhibition of *ofrendas*—altars holding offerings—made by students and faculty. True to Mexico City tradition they pay homage to the past with bold imagination.

Plan your trip at mexicocity.gob.mx or go to visitmexico.com.

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: MUSEO DE ARTE MODERNO ©LUIS A. DE JESUS R.; PARK IMAGE COURTESY OF CUIDAD DE MEXICO; PUJOL SPECIALTY ©PUJOL.COM.MX

side of the bubble while avoiding most of the downside—and, with timely selling, many of them succeeded.

Because financial markets consist of individuals who react to what others are doing, the theories of free-market economics are often less illuminating than the Prisoner's Dilemma, an analysis of strategic behavior that game theorists associated with the RAND Corporation developed during the early nineteen-fifties. Much of the work done at RAND was initially applied to the logic of nuclear warfare, but it has proved extremely useful in understanding another explosion-prone arena: Wall Street.

Imagine that you and another armed man have been arrested and charged with jointly carrying out a robbery. The two of you are being held and questioned separately, with no means of communicating. You know that, if you both confess, each of you will get ten years in jail, whereas if you both deny the crime you will be charged only with the lesser offense of gun possession, which carries a sentence of just three years in jail. The best scenario for you is if you confess and your partner doesn't: you'll be rewarded for your betrayal by being released, and he'll get a sentence of fifteen years. The worst scenario, accordingly, is if you keep quiet and he confesses.

What should you do? The optimal joint result would require the two of you to keep quiet, so that you both got a light sentence, amounting to a combined six years of jail time. Any other strategy means more collective jail time. But you know that you're risking the maximum penalty if you keep quiet, because your partner could seize a chance for freedom and betray you. And you know that your partner is bound to be making the same calculation. Hence, the rational strategy, for both of you, is to confess, and serve ten years in jail. In the language of game theory, confessing is a "dominant strategy," even though it leads to a disastrous outcome.

In a situation like this, what I do affects your welfare; what you do affects mine. The same applies in business. When General Motors cuts its prices or offers interest-free loans, Ford and Chrysler come under pressure to match G.M.'s deals, even if their finances are already stretched. If Merrill Lynch sets up a hedge fund to invest in collateralized debt obligations, or some other shiny new kind of security, Morgan Stanley will feel obliged to launch a similar fund to keep its wealthy clients from defecting. A hedge fund that eschews an overinflated sector can lag behind its rivals, and lose its major clients. So you can go bust by avoiding a bubble. As Charles Prince and others discovered, there's no good way out of this dilemma. Attempts to act responsibly and achieve a coöperative solution cannot be sustained, because they leave you vulnerable to exploitation by others. If Citigroup had sat out the credit boom while its rivals made huge profits, Prince would probably have been out of a job earlier. The same goes for individual traders at Wall Street firms. If a trader has one bad quarter, perhaps because he refused to participate in a bubble, the results can be career-threatening.

As the credit bubble continued, even the credit-rating agencies, which exist to provide investors with objective advice, got caught up in the same sort of competitive behavior that had persuaded banks like Citigroup, UBS, and Merrill Lynch to plunge into the subprime sector. Instead of adopting an arms-length approach and establishing a uniform set of standards for issuers of mortgage securities, the big three rating agencies—Fitch, Moody's, and Standard & Poor's—worked closely with Wall Street banks, and ended up giving AAA ratings to financial junk. But under the rating industry's business model, in which the issuers of securities pay the agencies for rating them, the agencies are dependent on Wall Street for their revenues.

Before Goldman Sachs, say, issued a hundred million dollars of residential-mortgage bonds, it would pay an agency like Moody's at least thirty or forty thousand dollars to issue a credit rating on the deal. As the boom continued, investment bankers played the agencies off one another, shopping around for a favorable rating. If one agency didn't think a bond deserved an investment-grade rating, the business would go to a more generously

"That's just the booze listening."

disposed rival. To stay in business, and certainly to maintain market share, credit analysts had to accentuate the positive.

The Prisoner's Dilemma is the obverse of Adam Smith's theory of the invisible hand, in which the free market coördinates the behavior of self-seeking individuals to the benefit of all. Each businessman "intends only his own gain," Smith wrote in "The Wealth of Nations," "and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention." But in a market environment the individual pursuit of self-interest, however rational, can give way to collective disaster. The invisible hand becomes a fist.

In February of 2002, the Millennium Bridge was reopened. The engineers at Ove Arup had figured out how the collective behavior of pedestrians caused the bridge to sway, and installed dozens of shock absorbers—under the bridge, around its supporting piers, and at one end of it. The embarrassing debacle of its début hasn't entirely faded from memory, but there have been no further problems.

It won't be as easy to deal with the bouts of instability to which our financial system is prone. But the first step is simply to recognize that they aren't aberrations; they are the inevitable result of individuals going about their normal business in a relatively unfettered marketplace. Our system of oversight fails to account for how sensible individual choices can add up to collective disaster. Rather than blaming the pedestrians for swarming the footway, governments need to reinforce the foundations of the structure, by installing more stabilizers. "Our system failed in basic fundamental ways," Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner acknowledged earlier this year. "To address this will require comprehensive reform. Not modest repairs at the margin, but new rules of the game."

Despite this radical statement of intent, serious doubts remain over whether the Obama Administration's proposed regulatory overhaul goes far enough in dealing with the problem of rational irrationality. Much of what the Administration has proposed is welcome. It would force issuers of mortgage securities to keep some of the bonds on their own books, and it would impose new capital requirements on any financial firm "whose combination of size, leverage, and interconnectedness could pose a threat to financial stability if it failed." None of these terms have been defined explicitly, however, and it isn't clear what the new rules will mean for big hedge funds, private-equity firms, and the finance arms of industrial companies. If there is any wiggle room, excessive risk-taking and other damaging behavior will simply migrate to the unregulated sector.

A proposed central clearinghouse for derivatives transactions is another good idea that perhaps doesn't go far enough. The clearinghouse plan applies only to "standardized" derivatives. Firms like JPMorgan Chase and Morgan Stanley would still be allowed to trade "customized" derivatives with limited public disclosure and no central clearing mechanism. Given the creativity of the Wall Street financial engineers, it wouldn't take them long to exploit this loophole.

The Administration has also proposed setting up a Consumer Financial Protection Agency, to guard individuals against predatory behavior on the part of banks and other financial firms, but its remit won't extend to vetting complex securities—like those notorious collateralized debt obligations—that Wall Street firms trade among themselves. Limiting the development of those securities would stifle innovation, the financial industry contends. But that's precisely the point. "The goal is not to have the most advanced financial system, but a financial system that is reasonably advanced but robust," Viral V. Acharya and Matthew Richardson, two economists at N.Y.U.'s Stern School of Business, wrote in a recent paper. "That's no different from what we seek in other areas of human activity. We don't use the most advanced aircraft to move millions of people around the world. We use reasonably advanced aircrafts whose designs have proved to be reliable."

During the Depression, the Glass-Steagall Act was passed in order to separate the essential utility aspects of the financial system—customer deposits, check clearing, and other payment systems—from the casino aspects, such as investment banking and proprietary trading. That key provision was repealed in 1999. The Administration has shown no interest in reinstating it, which means that "too big to fail" financial supermarkets, like

FIRST LEAF

That yellow
was a falling off,
a fall
for once I saw
coming—
it could
in its stillness
still be turned from,
it was not
yet ferocious,
its hold drew me,
was a shiny switchplate
in the otherwise dark,
rash, ongoing green,
a green so hungry
for light and air that
part gave up,
went alone,
chose to leave,
and by choosing
embellishment
got seen.

—*Lia Purpura*

Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase, will continue to dominate the financial system. And, since the federal government has now demonstrated that it will do whatever is necessary to prevent the collapse of the largest financial firms, their top executives will have an even greater incentive to enter perilous lines of business. If things turn out well, they will receive big bonuses and the value of their stock options will increase. If things go wrong, the taxpayer will be left to pick up some of the tab.

Executive pay is yet another issue that remains to be tackled in any meaningful way. Even some top bankers have conceded that current Wall Street remuneration schemes lead to excessive risk-taking. Lloyd Blankfein, the chief executive of Goldman Sachs, has suggested that traders and senior executives should receive some of their compensation in deferred payments. A few firms, including Morgan Stanley and UBS, have already introduced "clawback" schemes that allow the firm to rescind some or all of traders' bonuses if their investments turn sour. Without direct government involvement, however, the effort to reform Wall Street compensation won't survive the next market upturn. It's another version of the Prisoner's Dilemma. Although Wall Street as a whole has an interest in controlling rampant short-termism and irresponsible risk-taking, individual firms have an incentive to hire away star traders from rivals that have introduced pay limits. The compensation reforms are bound to break down. In this case, as in many others, the only way to reach a socially desirable outcome is to enforce compliance, and the only body that can do that is the government.

This doesn't mean that government regulators would be setting the pay of individual traders and executives. It does mean that the Fed, as the agency primarily responsible for insuring financial stability, should issue a set of uniform rules for Wall Street compensation. Firms might be obliged to hold some, or all, of their traders' bonuses in escrow accounts for a period of some years, or to give executive bonuses in the form of restricted stock that doesn't vest for five or ten years. (This was similar to one of Blankfein's suggestions.) In one encouraging sign, officials from the Fed and the Treasury are reportedly working on the details of Wall Street pay guidelines that would explicitly aim at preventing the reëmergence of rationally irrational behavior. "You don't want people being paid for taking too much risk, and you want to make sure that their compensation is tied to long-term performance," Geithner told the *Times* recently.

The Great Crunch wasn't just an indictment of Wall Street; it was a failure of economic analysis. From the late nineteen-nineties onward, the Fed stubbornly refused to recognize that speculative bubbles encourage the spread of rationally irrational behavior; convinced that the market was a self-regulating mechanism, it turned away from its traditional role, which is—in the words of a former Fed chairman, William McChesney Martin—"to take away the punch bowl just when the party gets going." A formal renunciation of the Greenspan doctrine is overdue. The Fed has a congressional mandate to insure maximum employment and stable prices. Morgan Stanley's Stephen Roach has suggested that Congress alter that mandate to include the preservation of financial stability. The addition of a third mandate would mesh with the Obama Administration's proposal to make the Fed the primary monitor of systemic risk, and it would also force the central bank's governors and staff to think more critically about the financial system and its role in the broader economy.

It's a pity that economists outside the Fed can't be legally obliged to acknowledge their errors. During the past few decades, much economic research has "tended to be motivated by the internal logic, intellectual sunk capital and esthetic puzzles of established research programmes rather than by a powerful desire to understand how the economy works—let alone how the economy works during times of stress and financial instability," notes Willem Buiter, a professor at the London School of Economics who has also served on the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee. "So the economics profession was caught unprepared when the crisis struck."

In creating this state of unreadiness, the role of free-market ideology cannot be ignored. Many leading economists still have a vision of the invisible hand satisfying wants, equating costs with benefits, and otherwise harmonizing the interests of the many. In a column that appeared in the *Times* in May, the Harvard economist Greg Mankiw, a former chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers and the author of two leading textbooks, conceded that teachers of freshman economics would now have to mention some issues that were previously relegated to more advanced courses, such as the role of financial institutions, the dangers of leverage, and the perils of economic forecasting. And yet "despite the enormity of recent events, the principles of economics are largely unchanged," Mankiw stated. "Students still need to learn about the gains from trade, supply and demand, the efficiency properties of market outcomes, and so on. These topics will remain the bread-and-butter of introductory courses."

Note the phrase "the efficiency properties of market outcomes." What does that refer to? Builders constructing homes for which there is no demand? Mortgage lenders foisting costly subprime loans on the cash-strapped elderly? Wall Street banks levering up their equity capital by forty to one? The global economy entering its steepest downturn since the nineteen-thirties? Of course not. Mankiw was referring to the textbook economics that he and others have been teaching for decades: the economics of Adam Smith and Milton Friedman. In the world of such utopian economics, the latest crisis of capitalism is always a blip.

As memories of September, 2008, fade, many will say that the Great Crunch wasn't so bad, after all, and skip over the vast government intervention that prevented a much, much worse outcome. Incentives for excessive risk-taking will revive, and so will the lobbying power of banks and other financial firms. "The window of opportunity for reform will not be open for long," Hyun Song Shin wrote recently. Before the political will for reform dissipates, it is essential to reckon with the financial system's fundamental design flaws. The next time the structure starts to lurch and sway, it could all fall down. ♦

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A live chat with John Cassidy.

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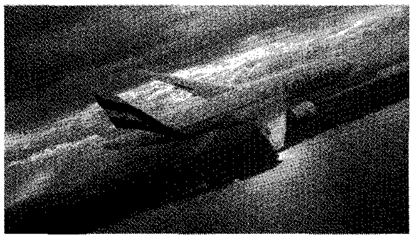

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

SPOUSAL SUPPORT

BY ZEV BOROW

> The Association for the Advancement of Advanced Intelligence report . . . will also grapple . . . [with] probable changes in human-computer relationships. How would it be, for example, to relate to a machine that is as intelligent as your spouse?
>
> —*The Times.*

Don't get me wrong; my wife is great. I bristle when I overhear someone say that my DVR is smarter than she is. Chloe went to SUNY-Binghamton. She's plenty smart. My DVR knows French, but so what? It's not like I go to French restaurants with my DVR. . . . O.K., one time I went to Le Pescadou with my DVR. Chloe and I were going through a weird time. I was hungry. There was nothing on TV. No, that last part about TV is a joke. Get it? Because I was with my DVR? Doesn't matter. Point is— No, actually, it does matter. My DVR would have got it.

My DVR is very funny. Not funny ha-ha, not like my A.T.M., but funny. It loves that movie "My Dinner with Andre." Between you and me, I have no idea if that movie is funny or not. I try to laugh in the right places, but who knows? And, well, sometimes it's nice to not always be the person who "knows" when to laugh, to be with someone—O.K., not someone, your DVR, or a G.P.S. system—and learn something.

I'm not being fair. Chloe can walk; she reads constantly. Mostly manuals, but still. Over all, she's very . . . present. Anyone who says she's not more intelligent, or at least more emotionally intelligent, than most of my appliances doesn't know her. Chloe knows to give me some space when I'm having a bad day. Not like the copy machine at work. That thing is such a bitch. It is sharp, though. Last year, during the primaries, when everyone was talking politics all the time, I admit I'd kind of wait to know what it was thinking before I'd offer my own opinion. Without it, I'm not sure if I'd have supported Obama.

Chloe gave money to Chris Dodd.

So, funny story, not meant to be a dig at Chloe, but funny (full disclosure: my DVR told it to me). The other night, she's home watching "Gossip Girl." My DVR wants to turn to Jim Lehrer but agrees to give Chloe's show a shot. After a few minutes, my DVR comments that it's "high camp." Chloe chuckles, says the show has nothing to do with summer camp and "most of the kids are not high." Classic.

I know it can be hard for her. There are certain types of machines out there—retina scanners, those really complex remote controls—that, to be honest, can be pretty caustic. I don't think Chloe will ever forget the time she said "irregardless" in front of the ticket kiosk at the Angelika. But, on the upside, she won't make that mistake again. And, I admit it, I get a charge (non-electrical) just from being around the really clever ones, hearing their opinions about the world, about places they've been. Like China, and Taiwan. These machines have expanded my world. I wouldn't have started doing yoga if it hadn't been for my toaster. Now I do yoga with my toaster.

Chloe, though, can be inflexible. A few weeks ago, my smartphone and I wanted to take a drive up the coast, just the two of us. There's a clam bar we both like, and Chloe is allergic to shellfish anyway. But she got upset. My phone gave me a look like "This is all you, bro." So, just to calm her down, I told her she probably didn't want to come, because there'd been a spate of attacks by giant prehistoric coastal birds. Then my phone, so quick, made up some name for the birds. After we left, Chloe went on Wikipedia and pieced together the truth. I blamed my phone for everything, tried to make a joke, something like "So much for having a smartphone, right? No pun intended."

She didn't get the pun.

I'll always love her, though. Can't imagine life without her smile. Of course, now I don't have to, because of my new digital camera. It's feather light (unlike Chloe), cynical but still somehow idealistic, and has ten megapixels. Chloe has, what, maybe one? ♦

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LETTER FROM TEHRAN

VEILED THREAT

What do the Iranian protests mean for the country's women?

Two days after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was sworn in for a second term as Iran's President, and nearly two months after large numbers of Iranians began protesting what they regard as fraud in the election of June 12th, I went to a gathering at an apartment in North Tehran. I was expecting to see Negin, an artist friend of mine, but when I asked where she was my hostess replied, "She was beaten up on inauguration day and is resting at home." I wanted to get in touch with Negin to see how she was, but, as a journalist who has been barred from working by the authorities, and whose conversations are probably being monitored, I hesitated to call her. The next day, however, I was getting my hair cut, and I realized that I was only a few streets away from Negin's apartment. I asked the barber if I might use his phone. Negin answered, and I said that I'd like to stop by.

When I think of the people I know who are active in Iran's pro-democracy movement, I think first of the women. It's not that the movement has been dominated or driven by women, or that the murder of Neda Agha-Solta—the young woman whose death at the hands of a sniper, on June 20th, was captured by mobile phone and beamed around the world—was more tragic or significant than that of Sohrab Arabi, a young Iranian man who was also killed during the protests. But when I look at photographs of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, when Iran won a parliament against strong monarchical opposition, and then at photographs of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and, finally, at footage of this summer's demonstrations in Tehran, I'm struck by the absence of women in the first, the paucity of women in the second, and the triumphant presence of women in the third.

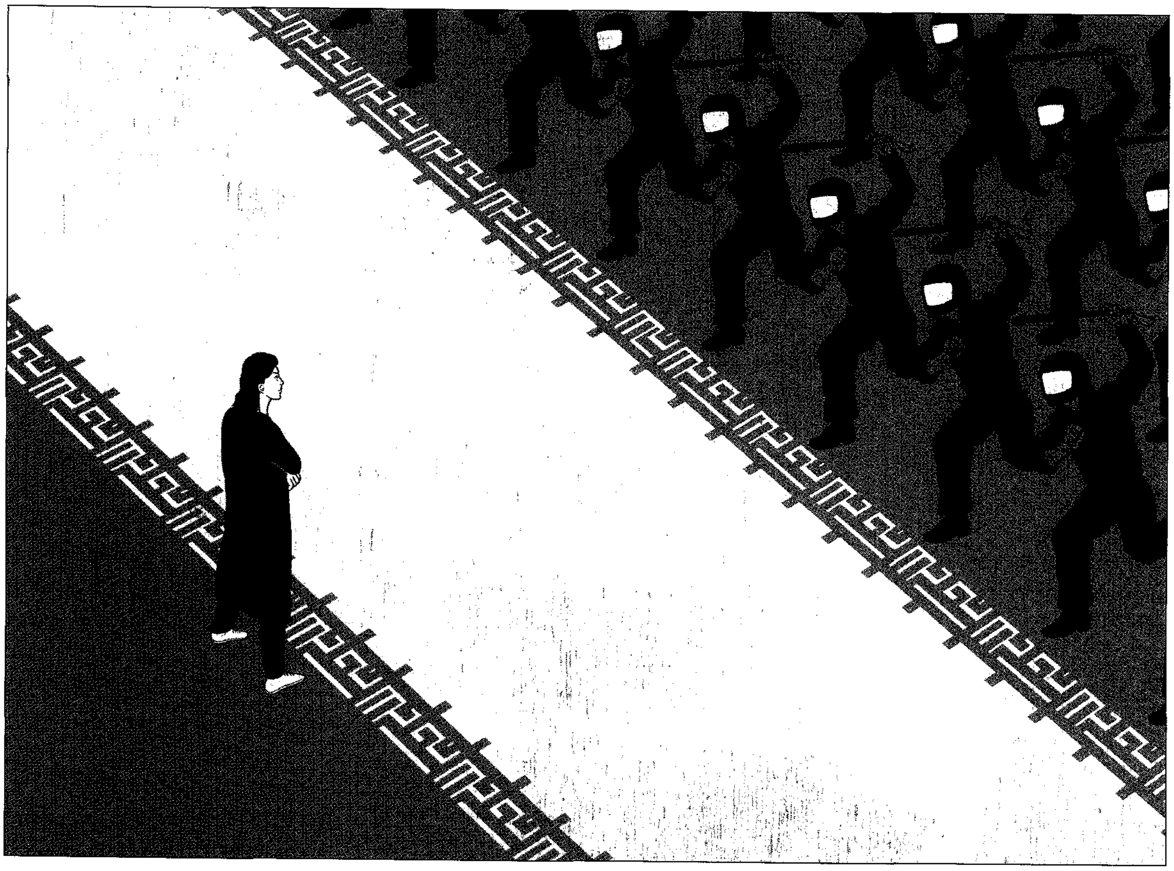
The story of women's rights in Iran is one of advances and setbacks, stretching back to the start of the twentieth century, when a national women's movement first took shape. In the nineteen-thirties, the wearing of the traditional veil was banned, as Reza Shah sought to establish a modern secular state, and women were allowed into universities. During the reign of his son, women gained the right to vote and to enter parliament, and many became students and teachers. After the 1979 Revolution, many women's rights were taken away, and strict clothing laws were enforced. Today, the Islamic Republic's gender laws are among the harshest in the world. They penalize women in the areas of marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Polygamy is legal for men, and the legal testimony of one man carries the same weight as that of two women, an imbalance that helps explain why there are so few convicted rapists in Iran. Against this background, women like Negin—educated, cosmopolitan, and old enough to have come of age before the Islamic Revolution—occupy an anomalous position. They were formed in a society far more liberal, if not necessarily freer, than the one they now inhabit. And though Iranian women remain very highly educated by the standards of surrounding countries, the social and professional avenues open to them are often disappointingly narrow.

This summer, as the protests against the election result spread and two of the defeated candidates, Mir-Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, emerged as figureheads for a pro-democracy movement, the political desire of millions of Iranians for an end to religious despotism was for the first time aligned with the aspirations of millions of Iranian women for more independence and dignity in their lives.

I know many women who had not been conspicuously political before the election but started attending every demonstration. The woman who told

FRANCESCO BONGIORNI

me that Negin had been hurt is shy and law-abiding, and she pampers her teenage son so much that everyone jokes that until recently he didn't know that apples had pips. Yet, over the summer, she went out once or twice a week to defy the power of the state. Even after violence turned the demonstrations into ordeals of nerve, she and others like her stood among the protesters, trembling with fear but voicing their hatred of the regime.



Negin opened the door. (I've changed her name and the names of others in this piece.) She is a strong, well-built woman in her mid-forties, with long black hair and a brilliant, even smile. It was a shock to see her now. One of her cheeks was bruised, the skin broken, and she limped heavily. She was wearing trousers, and told me that both of her legs were swollen and blue. She laughed and said, "Everyone looks so horrified when they see me that I can only say, 'It looks as though *you're* the one who got a truncheon in the face!' "

Negin lives on her own in a small, fifth-floor apartment. Living alone makes her an exception in a country where women are expected to leave their parents' home only when they enter their husband's. She was born into a traditional family in a provincial town in central Iran, and has not told her parents that she attended the demonstrations. Her mother is a strong supporter of the Islamic Republic and of its leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and a paternal uncle holds a position in the Revolutionary Guard. Whenever Negin sees this handsome, courteous man at family gatherings, she wonders if he has blood on his hands. The uncle has two sons who are in the Basij, a government-linked militia. When she went to the demonstrations, Negin half expected to see her cousins among the Basijis, lining up to hit and kick her.

Negin's apartment, which also serves as her art studio, was neat, with well-tended potted plants on the balcony, and canvases carefully stacked in a corner of her sitting room. Negin is a fine draftswoman, with a subtle sense of color, and if she had a greater appetite for self-promotion she might be a celebrated painter. But, following her own tastes rather than those of buyers or critics, she is only moderately well known, and supplements her income by working as a school administrator. We sat on chairs near her bookshelves, which were full of art books, eating chunks of melon, as she told me her story.

The demonstration of August 5th was the first that Negin had attended on her own. She usually went with a friend or in a group. Lone women can be vulnerable, so she intended to stay in her car, driving around among the demonstrators, honking and flashing a furtive "V"-for-victory sign. (If the police or the Basij see you doing this, they may take down your license number, and you risk arrest later; or they might smash your windshield.) But then she had seen some big groups walking around, shouting slogans. Although the police were watching, the scene appeared calm, so she parked her car and joined one of the groups.

"We were walking up and down the street, shouting our slogans, and then suddenly the police ran toward us," Negin said. "Everyone turned to flee, of course, but something came over me, and I couldn't move. I just stood like a fool. The police were getting closer and closer, and

Many Iranian women enjoy high levels of education but are nonetheless subject to some of the harshest gender laws in the world.

I decided to stand there, up against the wall, and hope they would run past." She smiled and shook her head.

"They ran past, but not without hitting me as they did—every single one of them, on my legs, on my back, everywhere. One stopped and hit me in the face and shouted at me, and he was a young man, and I remember thinking, This young man is hitting and insulting a woman he doesn't know, who is old enough to be his mother! He must be crazy or something! I pushed him back and shouted, 'What are you hitting me for!' He hit me some more and then he ran off and I felt water running down my leg. I looked down and saw I was covered in blood."

Negin asked a passing motorcyclist to give her a lift, and he took her into a side street where protesters were resting and hiding from the police. There, another man bound her leg, and she called her sister, a pharmacist, who drove over immediately to pick her up. Because it was well known that the security forces had officers in the hospitals who arrested anyone whose injuries were consistent with a truncheon blow, her sister phoned a doctor she knew and asked if she could bring Negin over.

The doctor examined Negin, ascertained that her leg wasn't broken, and gave her painkillers. During the examination, a group of demonstrators had gathered in the street outside the doctor's office, and Negin and her sister had to wait until the commotion had passed. Negin went on, "Luckily, I was in a good mood by then. Perhaps it was the painkillers. I was making everyone laugh. The doctor's assistant said something about the dimples in my cheek, and I said, 'I never had a dimple there! They must have hit me there with a truncheon!' "

That evening, Negin's sister took her home and put her to bed. The doctor had instructed Negin to keep her leg up for several days. If it became infected, he warned, she would have to go to the hospital. That night, for the first time in her life, Negin took a sleeping pill. Whenever she closed her eyes, she saw the policeman shouting at her and then hitting her in the face.

While she told me her story, Negin poured tea and served it to me with *poolak*, disks of caramelized sugar. I remembered something she had said during our last conversation, shortly after the killings and the mass arrests of June 20th. At the time, Negin, like many other Tehranis, was in shock. She told me how she and a friend had been caught up in the tear gas that day, and in the firing and the beatings; having fled to a quiet street, the two women had sat exhausted by the side of the road, and wept. On the opposite side of the street stood a group of young Basijis. They, too, were exhausted and had taken off their helmets and laid down their truncheons. They were laughing and drinking sherbet from a roadside stall. Negin had looked at the boys, with their sweaty, elated faces, and wept even harder. "As a woman," Negin told me, smiling apologetically, "I have come to regard men and violence as inseparable."

THE THREE LITTLE OVEREXTENDED PIGS
We just can't afford this place anymore!
What are we going to do?
Maybe that wolf gentleman is still interested!

Negin has lived most of her life with the expectation of seeing violence. Hundreds of people, maybe more, were killed during the struggle to end the monarchy. The new revolutionary authorities executed members of the Shah's regime and released photographs of their corpses. The Iran-Iraq War, which in eight years cost more than a quarter of a million Iranian lives, and whose effects will be felt for generations, placed martyrdom at the center of the country's official culture. Now there are public hangings of murderers and drug dealers. Disputes between motorists are resolved with crowbars. Children attending Friday prayers join their parents in shouting, "Death to America!" Alongside Iran's humane literary and artistic culture, there is a second culture, of murder and obscenity.

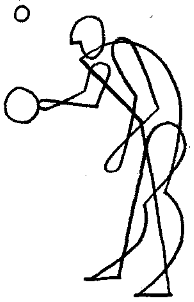
As a teen-ager, Negin participated in demonstrations before the 1979 Revolution, and she remembers the Shah's troops calling her and other female protesters "whores"—for being out on the streets. Then, as various revolutionary currents came together under the influence of the exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, she and women like her started to feel the effects of a radical ideology. "At first, they told us to put on a head scarf, out of respect for the beliefs of the majority, and we agreed that we must do whatever was necessary to achieve freedom from the Shah," she said. "Then, after the Revolution, they attacked women for wearing makeup in public, and we went along with that, too, because we regarded makeup as a bourgeois affectation. Finally, they told us, 'Sorry! A head scarf is not sufficient as a hijab.' " Now, when she goes to work, Negin must wear a *maghna'eh*, a black hooded coat.

During last summer's demonstrations, female protesters were harassed by Basijis, and sexually threatened. For many Iranians, especially older people, such behavior is evidence of the regime's moral degeneration; accepted codes of conduct hold that men and women occupying the same public space should be segregated or, if contact is unavoidable, should treat each other with distant courtesy. Negin said, "The people going out to break up demonstrations have been told that they are God's foot soldiers. They have been brainwashed into thinking that normal standards of behavior and decency don't apply."

A few days later, Mehdi Karroubi showed a similar sense of outrage, posting on a Web site a letter he had written to Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former President and a bitter foe of Ahmadinejad. Karroubi wrote that he had been reliably informed that men and women who were detained during the recent disturbances had been tortured while in custody. Male prisoners had been sodomized with truncheons, and women raped so violently, so frequently, that their reproductive organs had been badly torn. Karroubi's letter appeared shortly after a show-trial hearing that was notable for the shocking physical state of some of the defendants, high-ranking supporters of Moussavi, Karroubi, and former President Mohammad Khatami. Suspicions that these defendants had been maltreated in jail were reinforced later on by one woman's claim that her father—one of the defendants—had indeed been tortured. The spectacle of the trial aroused both fear of the regime and repugnance toward it.

In response to government criticism of his letter, Karroubi published an affidavit by a male victim of jail rape. The published account did not dwell on the rape itself but on its aftermath. The man had been freed and recounted his ordeal, only to be summoned to an interrogation, at which judiciary officials ridiculed his allegations and said that he had brought shame on himself and his family. They also asked whether his assailant had achieved orgasm—a question designed, the man said, "to destroy my spirit and my morale."

For many Iranians, the show trial and the reports of brutality, even more than the original suspicions of electoral fraud, have stripped away the aura of piety that has surrounded the Islamic Republic for thirty years. As the government's moral authority wanes, violence has become its principal source of power—and violence is not a monopoly of the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij. Several Basijis were killed by protesters during the summer's disturbances. Early in the protests, I heard an account of a group of women who toppled Basijis from their motorbikes in a northern Tehran suburb; only the arrival of reinforcements saved them from a lynching.



A few weeks before Negin was hurt, I was invited to a dinner party. The other guests were mostly cultivated, middle-aged women engaged in business or the arts. Before the protests, we might have spent the evening talking about films and books and foreign travel, but the night was disturbed by the sound of people gathered on the rooftops of their apartment blocks, yelling "*Allahu akbar!*"—a rallying cry from the Revolution which had been revived by the opposition. Thousands of people were thought to be behind bars, some of whom we knew. One had been in this house a few weeks earlier.

All of us were fearful that night, but we still hoped that the disturbances would force Ahmadinejad from office. In the course of the evening, we consumed a great deal of bootleg alcohol, and no senior member of the regime escaped the women's lacerating wit. One of the guests, who runs a publishing house, asked permission to tell a "true filthy story," which she was sure we would appreciate. She described a demonstration that she had taken part in a few days earlier. Two Basijis had attacked the group, using their truncheons and hitting one young man on the forehead. But the Basijis underestimated the size of the crowd and were forced to retreat as the protesters rushed toward them.

"As he was fleeing," the woman said, "one of the Basijis dropped his walkie-talkie, and we heard the voice of his comrade, calling, 'Isar! Isar! Do you read me? Isar?' The young man who had been hit on the forehead, and who now had blood running down his face, poor thing, put the walkie-talkie to his mouth and shouted, 'Listen here—I fucked Isar's sister and his mother, and now I'll fuck yours!' "

The guests exploded with laughter. They hated the Basijis as much as the Basijis hated them. Later, the party broke up and the woman who had told the story distributed spearmint gum to each of the guests—"just in case you get stopped on the way home and they sniff your breath for booze."

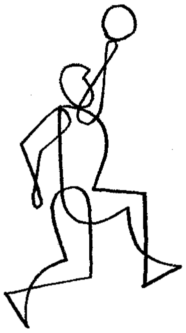
A few days later, I went to visit a woman called Shahrzad, who lives with her son, Kaveh, in a large old apartment lined with books; she used to share the apartment with her late husband, an architect. In her youth, Shahrzad was renowned for her beauty. She is in her fifties now and has a laugh that is throaty and full of mischief. It was one of the hottest days of the year, and the apartment had a single, antiquated air-conditioning unit. She sat me down in front of it—"the only place that's bearable in the whole place!"—and brought me sour-cherry sherbet.

Shahrzad is a translator. She told me that she had hardly done any work since the election. Her life had been taken over by the movement. On days when there was no demonstration, she spent her time surfing the opposition's Web sites using anti-filter software—most Persian-language sites have been blocked by the authorities—and pasting notable articles and blogs into group e-mails. She added the request "Delete sender's identity before forwarding," because the authorities were known to monitor people's communications. She showed me a cartoon that she was e-mailing to her list of contacts. It depicted a Basiji sniffing a man's mouth and saying, "Let's see if you give off a stench of *Allahu akbar*."

Shahrzad told me that she had two daughters who were studying abroad. Their absence was a relief. "If they were here, they would be in the thick of the demonstrations, and I'd be ill with worry," she said. Instead, Kaveh accompanied her to the demonstrations. He came home as we were talking, a slim, handsome young man, accompanied by his girlfriend. They immediately sat down at Kaveh's laptop to find out when the next demonstration would be, and to find out about friends who had been detained. As they hunched over the screen, Shahrzad whispered to me, "I dread the day they arrest him. Even more than that, I dread to think what would happen if he suffered a fraction of what they're doing to the other boys in jail."

Like Negin, Shahrzad had joined the protests in 1978-79, and had been angry when it became clear that the Islamic Republic would discriminate against women. She and her husband remained in Tehran during the Iran-Iraq War. They were not tempted to move abroad, even in the mid-nineties, when several secular-minded writers and intellectuals were murdered by agents from the Intelligence Ministry. "We had seen Iranians living as exiles abroad," Shahrzad said, "and it had made us sad."

In Ahmadinejad's first term, books, music albums, and scripts gathered dust at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, before being rejected in their entirety or cut with broad, destructive strokes. Many in the artistic community sought a means of emigrating. Shortly before my visit, Shahrzad had received several sheets of suggested amendments to a reprint of a translation of hers that had been cleared for publication without censorship a decade before. This time, she had been told to cut the work by several pages. "What exactly has changed in ten years, that a book that was acceptable then should be unacceptable now?" she said.



Like many others who are involved with Iran's women's movement, Shahrzad voted for Karroubi in June's election, because, unlike Moussavi, he had signed on unequivocally to the demands of women's-rights activists, including constitutional and legal amendments to end discrimination between the sexes. A particular challenge for women's-rights activists has been to counter the government's depiction of their movement as a vehicle for sexual anarchy and "moral corruption"—a portrayal that many traditional-minded Iranians, women among them, find persuasive. In 2006, Shahrzad took part in a demonstration by women's-rights activists that was forcibly broken up. She recalls the contemptuous comments of shopkeepers nearby. "These women would be better off coming into my shop and buying clothes," one said. "They need husbands," another replied.

It is possible that last summer's protests have advanced the cause of women further than any formal movement could have. For the first time in Iran's history, men and women in large numbers marched as equals. When, at Friday prayers on July 17th, thousands of men and women scandalized traditionalists by praying side by side, in the streets around Tehran University, Iran's culture of separation gave way to one of solidarity.

Shahrzad told me about a woman who had become well known among the demonstrators for her interventions whenever she saw a Basiji beating a young man. "She doesn't intervene in the normal way, which is to scream 'Don't hit him!' and to try and physically restrain the Basiji," Shahrzad said. "Instead, she strides over to the protester and admonishes him, 'Fereydun! I told you not to come out today and make mischief! Come home immediately!' Then she hustles him away from the startled Basiji."

The story showed the ironies inherent in the involvement of Iranian women in a violent political movement. It appealed to Shahrzad that the woman in question had mischievously exploited the maternal role that society allotted her in order to save young men from a beating. Inside this movement of oppressed freedom-seekers, Shahrzad seemed to be saying, there was a second, less obtrusive movement, of women playing with their status.

She told me a similar story about a protest she had attended in July, shortly after the election. One afternoon, Shahrzad had come across a rally to mark Ahmadinejad's official victory. It was a response to a much bigger demonstration, in support of Moussavi and Karroubi, a few miles to the north. Shahrzad found herself in a press of people, most of them women wearing chadors and holding Ahmadinejad posters. "I realized I was stuck," she said.

"As we stood there waiting," Shahrzad went on, "I heard a woman speaking in a loud, coarse voice behind me. She was mouthing off against Ahmadinejad's opponents. She said, 'They deserve to be killed like dogs! They want to be free and walk naked down the street. Where do they think they are? Europe? America?' "

Normally, Shahrzad would not have responded to this provocation, which was standard government propaganda. But she felt bruised and angry. "The people around me had come to celebrate a victory that I considered to be a theft, and there was a triumphalism in the woman's voice that I couldn't stand," she said. "It suddenly occurred to me that she had sized me up as an opposition sympathizer and was addressing me. Suddenly, she said loudly, very near my ear, 'Revolting uptown girl!' "

Shahrzad turned to confront her antagonist and saw that the woman was not dressed chastely, as she had expected. "She was stuffed into a tight coat that hugged the contours of her body, and she was made up to the nines! I immediately thought of the last regime, when court officials bribed mobs to come into the streets and demonstrate in favor of the Shah, and the mobs included prostitutes from the red-light district."

There was no way of knowing whether the woman was a hired rabble-rouser, but her appearance, Shahrzad realized, presented an opportunity. In a stern, admonitory tone, Shahrzad asked, "Why are you wearing so much eyeliner? Weren't you ever told you should only wear makeup for your husband?"

The woman, taken aback, replied that she didn't have a husband but then realized that this was the wrong thing to say in front of the Ahmadinejad women, so she started attacking former President Mohammad Khatami. "It's all his fault!" she exclaimed. "He allowed moral corruption to grow and encouraged women to wear makeup. He's to blame!"

Shahrzad was enjoying herself now. Several conservatively dressed women had gathered and were following the argument with interest. Shahrzad retorted, "You blame Khatami for the fact that you're wearing eyeliner? Khatami has been out of power for the past four years! Didn't you find the time to wash off your eyeliner?" Shahrzad's gaze fell on the woman's coat. "And why are you wearing such tight clothes?"

In this way, Shahrzad exacted her revenge. Soon, the Ahmadinejad supporters were agreeing that the woman was inappropriately dressed. One of them said, "Someone might think that you were a woman of ill repute."

"I'm clean!" the woman wailed. "I'm clean!" But the other woman muttered, "The shopkeeper never admits his curds are off," and everyone laughed. The object of their derision, defeated, swore at Shahrzad, before forcing her way through the crowd and slinking away.

When Shahrzad finished her story, she and I were smiling, but Kaveh was looking hard at the dregs of his coffee. Shahrzad rested her hand on his and explained, "Kaveh doesn't like this story. He doesn't like that I humiliated this woman using arguments I don't believe in."

"I'm doing super, but Clark Kent can't find a newspaper that's hiring."

At the end of the summer, as the weather was starting to cool, Negin dropped by to see me. Her cheek was healed. She was walking without a limp and looked rested. She described a dream that she had had a few days before.

"I was sitting in the mountains and looking at two peaks in front of me," she said. "It was a placid scene. Suddenly, the peaks began to tremble, and rocks and snow fell off and landed nearby. The trembling grew more intense and then the mountains split in two and collapsed, and there was a great cloud of dust in the sky. When the dust settled, I could see beyond the ruins of the mountains. There, on the plain, very small and far away, I saw different types of military equipment—jeeps and tanks and rocket launchers on wheels, being driven around."

Negin had asked several friends what they thought her dream meant. They had all said that the collapse of the mountains represented the collapse of the Islamic Republic's claims to divine legitimacy. The plain full of tanks and guns represented the militarization of society, the victory of the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij.

As soon as her wounds healed, Negin spent a week at her parents' place, where she learned that her uncle, the Revolutionary Guard officer, had been involved in the movement's suppression. This uncle had been part of a team that seized a large group of protesters and took them to a place where they were beaten to a pulp. Negin's Basij cousins had also been out that day, cracking heads.

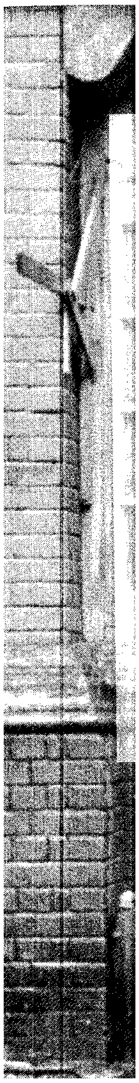
"What about your mother?" I asked. "Does she still love Khamenei?" Negin shook her head and said, "Whenever she sees him on television, she turns away and says, 'Enough of the lies. Enough!' "

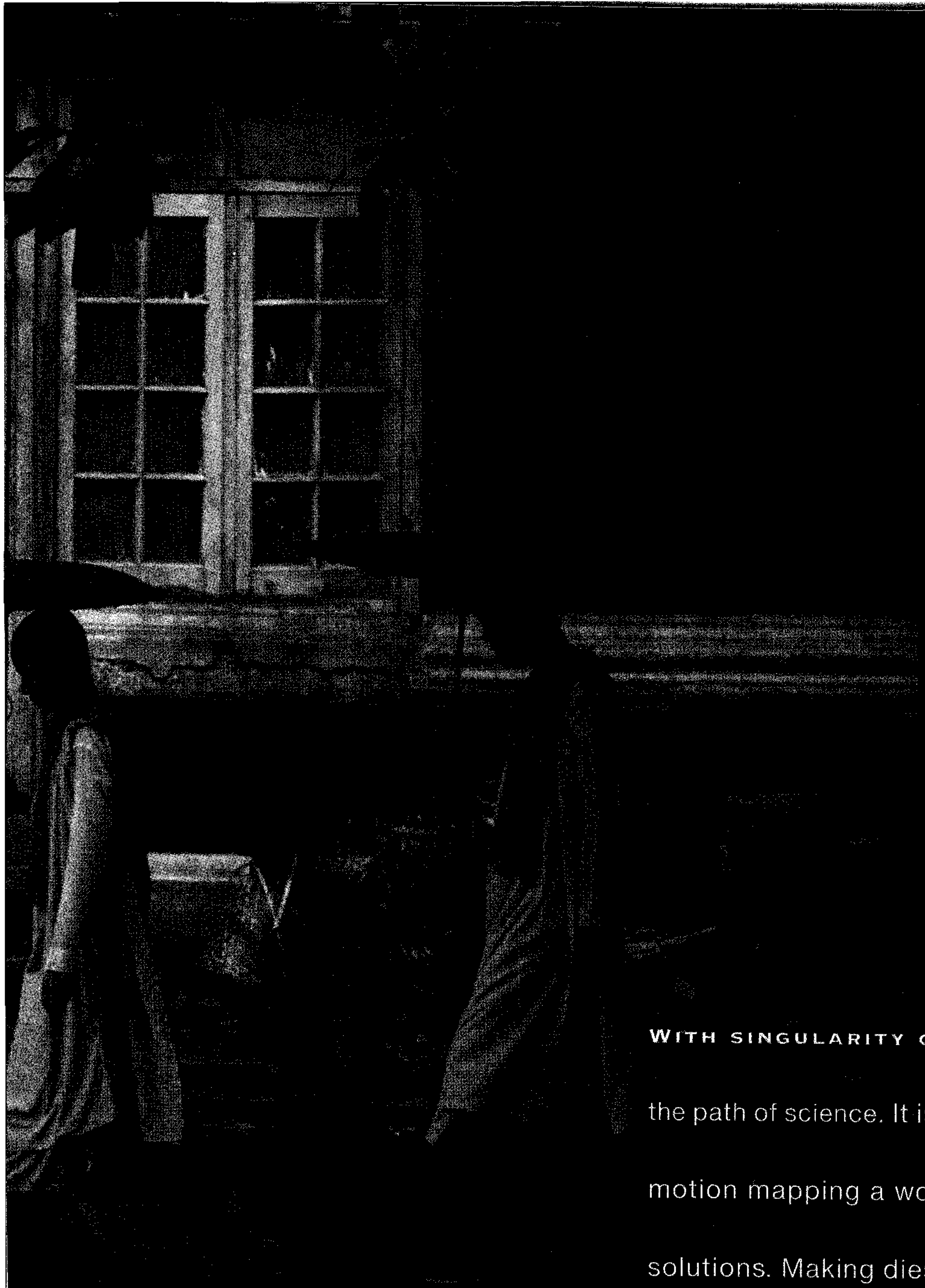
Negin's return to the capital had coincided with the end of the demonstrations. Ahmadinejad was trying to persuade parliament to support his nominees for cabinet positions; it was almost as if politics had returned to normal. The movement seemed dormant; what if it never came to life again? I knew lots of people who were apprehensive that the suffering would turn out to be worthless.

Reports of torture undoubtedly contributed to a decline in street protests at the end of the summer. The fasting month of Ramadan was another factor; people felt listless and tired. But it was clear that people had lost a lot of their old fear. Indeed, many thousands of opposition supporters succeeded in subverting Jerusalem Day—an official protest against Israel and its actions in Gaza and Lebanon, which falls at the end of Ramadan—and turning it into a demonstration against the regime. If a new round of demonstrations occurs in the coming weeks, they may be more violent. The protesters will know what is in store for them if they are arrested.

As Iran enters a new phase of uncertainty, and international powers wrangle over its nuclear program, Iranians are keenly aware that their country has changed. Not so long ago, assertive, politically aware women were an isolated minority. This is no longer true. Even traditional people like Negin's mother are revising their loyalties. And the middle tier of Iranian society has become urgently politicized—activists whose goal, an end to tyranny, is now clear. Half of that tier is women.

Negin and Shahrzad were among the Jerusalem Day demonstrators. "Not for Gaza and not for Lebanon!" they shouted. "I will give up my life for Iran." ♦





WITH SINGULARITY OF PURPOSE. That is the path of science. It is in constant forward motion mapping a world of problems and solutions. Making diesel run cleaner, solar energy more accessible and carbon emissions more containable. Science is in the business of solving problems. And we are in the business of science. Following a path illuminated by the values of the Human Element.

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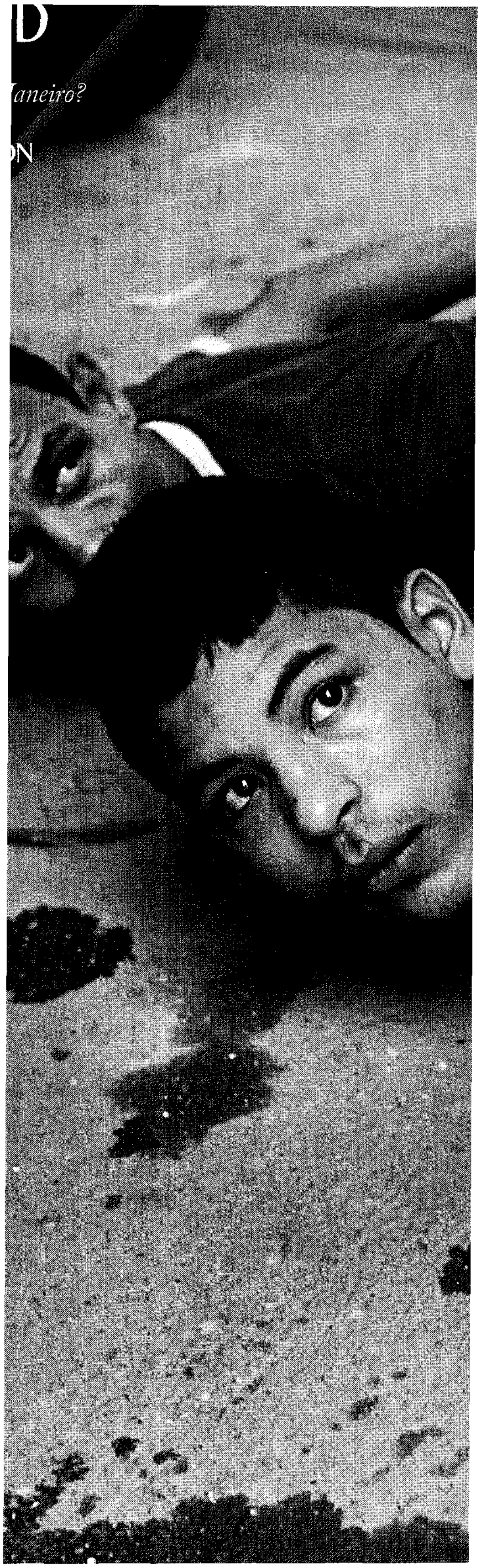
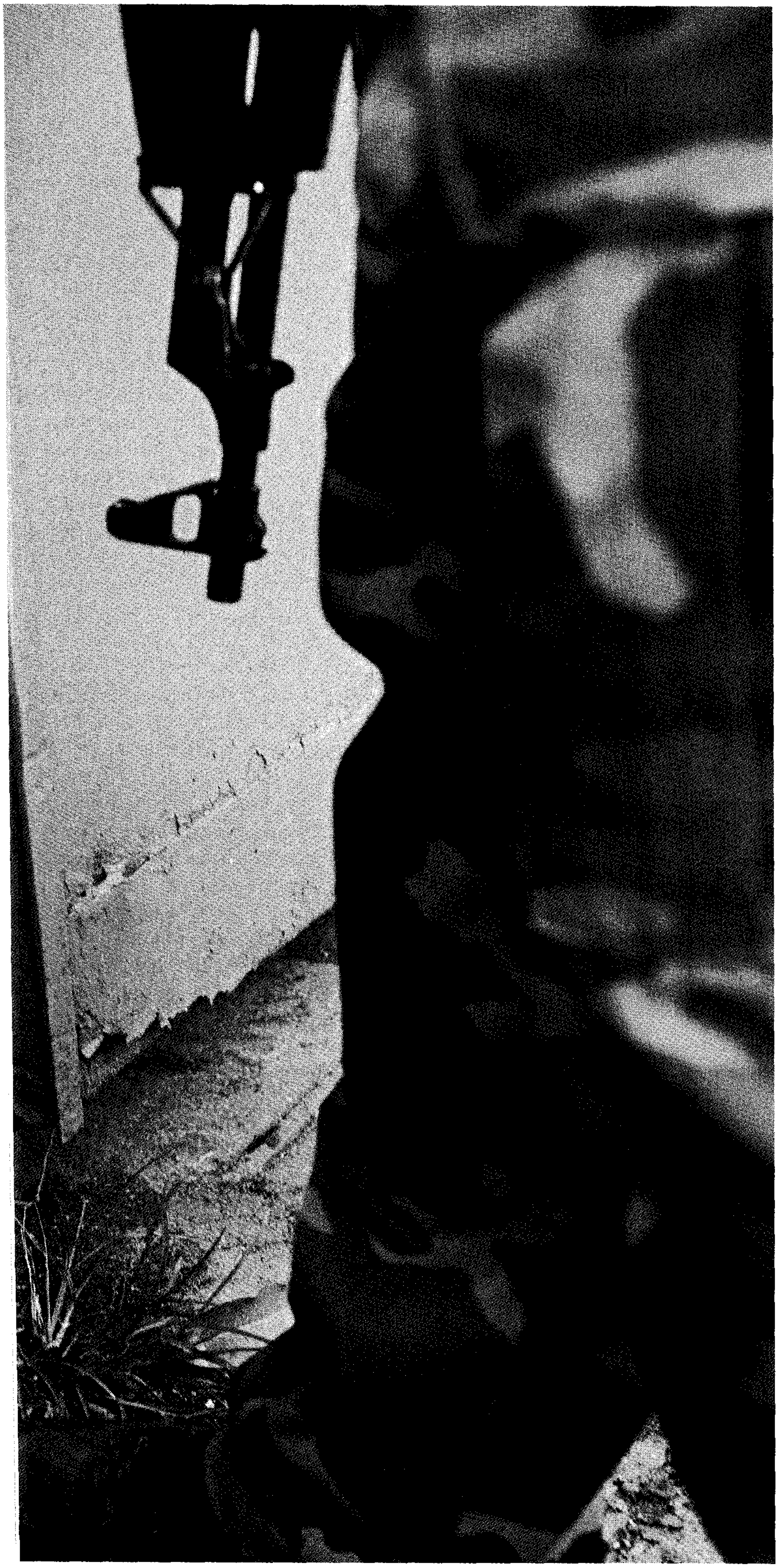


de Janeiro, a stronghold of the Terceiro Comando



e under the de-facto authority of a gangster and his private army. *Photographs by João Pina.*

Iara, a slight, dark-skinned woman of thirty-one, manages the favela of Parque Royal, in Rio de Janeiro, for a gangster named Fernandinho. She calls herself his *sub-delegada*. When I met her, Iara was organizing a tenth-birthday party for the youngest of her three daughters. She wore a T-shirt, shorts, flip-flops, and a black baseball cap over a ponytail. Her T-shirt had a message, in Portuguese: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from evil. John 17:15." There was a bulge where a pistol was tucked into her shorts.

Iara handled "community relations" on behalf of her gang, the Terceiro Comando Puro, or Pure Third Command. (She called it "the firm.") It was a new position, but it was necessary. "Before, there were some problems, mostly disrespect shown by the *traficantes* toward the locals," she said. Iara usually dealt with problems by "talking to people," but if the problem was big she would "take it up the hill"—a reference to Morro do Dendê, the favela where Fernandinho lived. There had been a problem the previous day: "A husband beating his wife. She wanted to separate, he beat her." Iara didn't spell out how it was resolved, but it had been.

We were walking through the favela—a mess of slapped-up houses of corrugated tin and unpainted brick, dreadlocked tangles of pilfered electrical wiring, and graffiti-covered walls and alleyways where little shops and rudimentary bars selling beer and *cachaça* jostled for space with storefront evangelical churches. Parque Royal is built on what used to be a mangrove swamp, and Iara's home sits on a litter-strewn bayside promenade. The air stinks heavily of raw sewage, but no one seems to notice. Rough-looking armed young men, drug dealers from her gang, guard the alleyways. She spoke with them so that they would not do me any harm.

Iara had a tattoo of a scorpion on her left arm, surrounded by the initials of the people who were closest to her: her three daughters, her mother, her sister, and a niece and a nephew. Iara's father left her mother when she was a year old. Her mother was an alcoholic, she said, "but she isn't anymore." She was now an *evangélica*. Iara had played soccer as a girl, and been good enough to practice with professionals—she named a couple of well-known players. She had even been on TV. But her older brother used to beat her. "He said I was a lesbian."

When she was fourteen, Iara had entered the local branch of the Pure Third Command. "I slowly got involved to protect myself from my brother, to get respect," she said. "Once I joined, we had no more trouble from him." Iara's brother was now in Bangu, a prison west of Rio, where most of Brazil's gangsters are sent, and which the gangs also control. "He's in prison for the sixth time," she said. "He was a drug dealer and a robber."

Iara's oldest daughter, fourteen, came up to tell her something. She wore a pink T-shirt and shorts. When she had gone, Iara said proudly, "She's a good girl, very responsible. She even tells me off."

As the gang's woman in Parque Royal, Iara earned a salary of five hundred reis a week—about two hundred and fifty dollars—as well as a percentage of the drug sales. She usually made around a thousand reis a week: "If the product is good, sales are better." It was enough to support her family. "My only problem is I am addicted to *maconha*"—weed. She laughed. "If it was up to me, I would smoke only four times a day, but the problem is, whenever I go out, there's always someone smoking a joint."

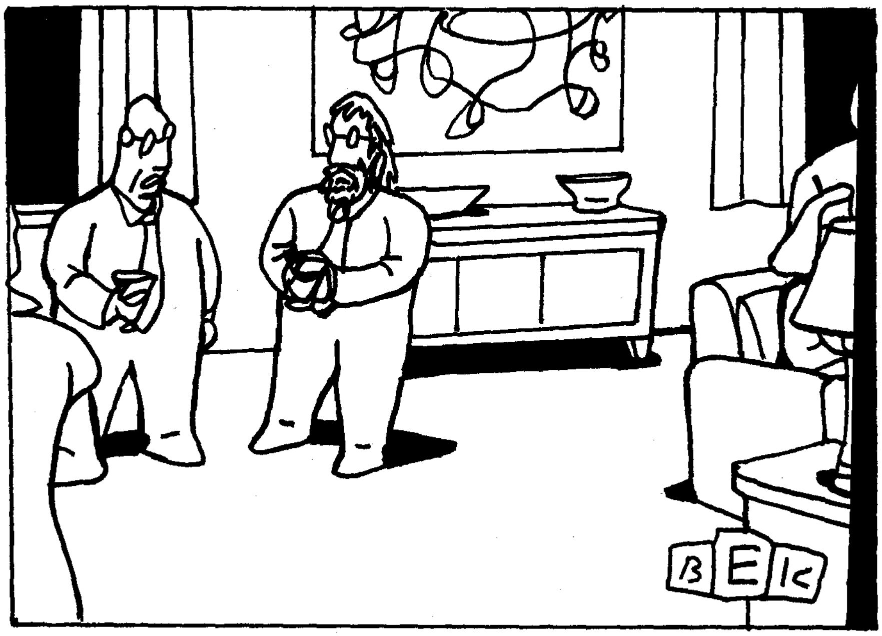
She had "retired" the year before, she said. But, when her successor was shot, Fernandinho's deputy, Gilberto Coelho de Oliveira, whom everyone knew as Gil, had asked her to return to her duties, and she had. Gil, who was Fernandinho's best friend from childhood, was said to be the more violent of the two.

Iara didn't give much thought to the future. The most perfect life she could imagine would be "just living, with my girls."

After a pause, she volunteered that at the same age as her eldest daughter, the one I had just seen, she had been raped. "I was too small, so he cut my vagina with a knife," she said. "I had seven stitches, and was in the hospital for a week." Afterward, she had fled home and gone to live with another man—"the man who became the father of my girls." But he had taken a lot of drugs, and after a time she had left him. She was now on her own.

I asked Iara if she was religious. She wasn't, she said, although she sometimes accompanied her aunt to a church. And she liked Pastor Sidney, a popular local evangelical preacher, "because he talks to everyone, and if there's someone who is going to be executed he goes and talks to the big man," she said. "Everyone knows that if there's a problem there's one guy to go to, to fix it, and that's Fernandinho."

Parque Royal is situated on Ilha do Governador, the largest of the islands that dot the great inland bay of Guanabara. It was named for a colonial-era Portuguese governor who built a sugarcane plantation there, but nowadays Ilha is at the edge of the sprawling metropolis of Rio, linked to the mainland by bridges and raised highways. Rio's main airport, Galeão-Antônio Carlos Jobim International—named for the father of bossa nova—is here, squeezed in with an air-force base, a nature reserve, a shipyard, some petrochemical plants, and almost half a million residents, roughly twenty per cent of whom live in favelas.



"His schlock has gravitas."

Rio's first favelas—the name comes from a fast-growing weed—date back to the years after Brazil's abolition of slavery, in 1888. Freed slaves with nowhere else to live built shanties on open hillsides or in partly drained mangrove swamps. They were joined by unemployed former soldiers and more recently by Brazil's rural poor, who flooded the city, fleeing chronic drought and poverty. Twenty years ago, there were said to be three hundred favelas in Rio. Ten years ago, the number had climbed to six hundred. No one knows exactly how many favelas there are today, but it is estimated that more than a thousand exist, housing perhaps three million of Rio's fourteen million inhabitants.

In Rio, the favelas edge up to the airport highway and spread into the distance. At times, bullets crack overhead, as rival gangs on either side of the highway shoot it out. They have been known to come onto the road with their guns to rob motorists. Most visitors head straight from the airport on Ilha to beachfront hotels in the Zona Sul, the affluent southern part of the city, on the far side of the mountains of Tijuca National Park. But there are favelas in Zona Sul, too; there is no way to completely escape Rio's misery.

In a pattern that repeats itself all over Rio, Ilha's residents live under the de-facto authority of a gangster and his private army. Fernandinho is a thirty-one-year-old drug dealer whose full name is Fernando Gomes de Freitas. There are eighteen favelas on Ilha, and Morro do Dendê, the slum-covered hill where he lives, is the biggest, and one of the largest in the city. Fernandinho controls all but one of Ilha's favelas on behalf of the Pure Third Command. In addition to running Ilha's narcotics trade, he takes commissions—protection money—from legal businesses such as bus companies, cable-television operators, and suppliers

HEAVEN'S EEL

A slight wrinkle on the pond.
Small wind.
A small wind and the rumpled clouds' reflection.
Ho hum . . . What's needed is something under the pond's skin,
Something we can't see that controls all the things that we do see.
Something long and slithery,
something we can't begin to comprehend,
A future we're all engendered for, sharp teeth, Lord, such sharp teeth.
Heaven's eel.
Heaven's eel, long and slick,
Full moon gone, with nothing in its place.

A doe is nibbling away at the long stalks of the natural world
Across the creek.
It's good to be here.
It's good to be where the world's quiescent, and reminiscent.
No wind blows from the far sky.
Beware of prosperity, friend, and seek affection.
The eel's world is not your world,
but will be soon enough.

—*Charles Wright*

of cooking gas. In 2007, police calculated that Fernandinho earned about three hundred thousand dollars a month from drugs, but they speculated that his other sources of income might dwarf this. He enforces his rule and imposes summary justice through an armed posse. He is a fugitive—one of the most-wanted criminals in Rio. On a police warrant, he is described as "the boss of Morro do Dendê/Ilha do Governador, armed and dangerous, capable of killing anyone who doesn't agree with him or who disobeys his orders." His other aliases are Lopes, Cebolinha (Little Onion), the Lion, and Fernandinho Guarabu—for the favela where he was born. His father was a bricklayer and a drunk, and mistreated him and his mother. He is dead. Fernandinho's mother works as a cashier and is said to have refused his money.

Despite the outstanding warrants, Fernandinho lives openly in Morro do Dendê, essentially hiding in plain sight. He assumed control of Ilha five years ago, after his predecessor, an older gangster named Bizulai, who had taken a liking to him and made him his top lieutenant, was shot dead by military police. There have been several high-profile police attempts to capture or kill Fernandinho. In November, 2005, police raided the favela on the eve of a party that Fernandinho had planned to mark his twenty-seventh birthday and the opening of a community swimming pool that he had had built. The police missed Fernandinho but confiscated ten thousand cans of beer. They tried again in 2007, when Fernandinho threw another party, this time to celebrate the arrest of his archrival, Marcelo Soares de Madeiros, known as Marcelo PQD (the letters are short for *paraquedista*, "paratrooper"). Fernandinho got away; the police found a four-and-a-half-foot cake decorated with the Twenty-third Psalm, spelled out in icing. They also found an effigy of Marcelo PQD, wearing red panties, hanging from a lamppost.

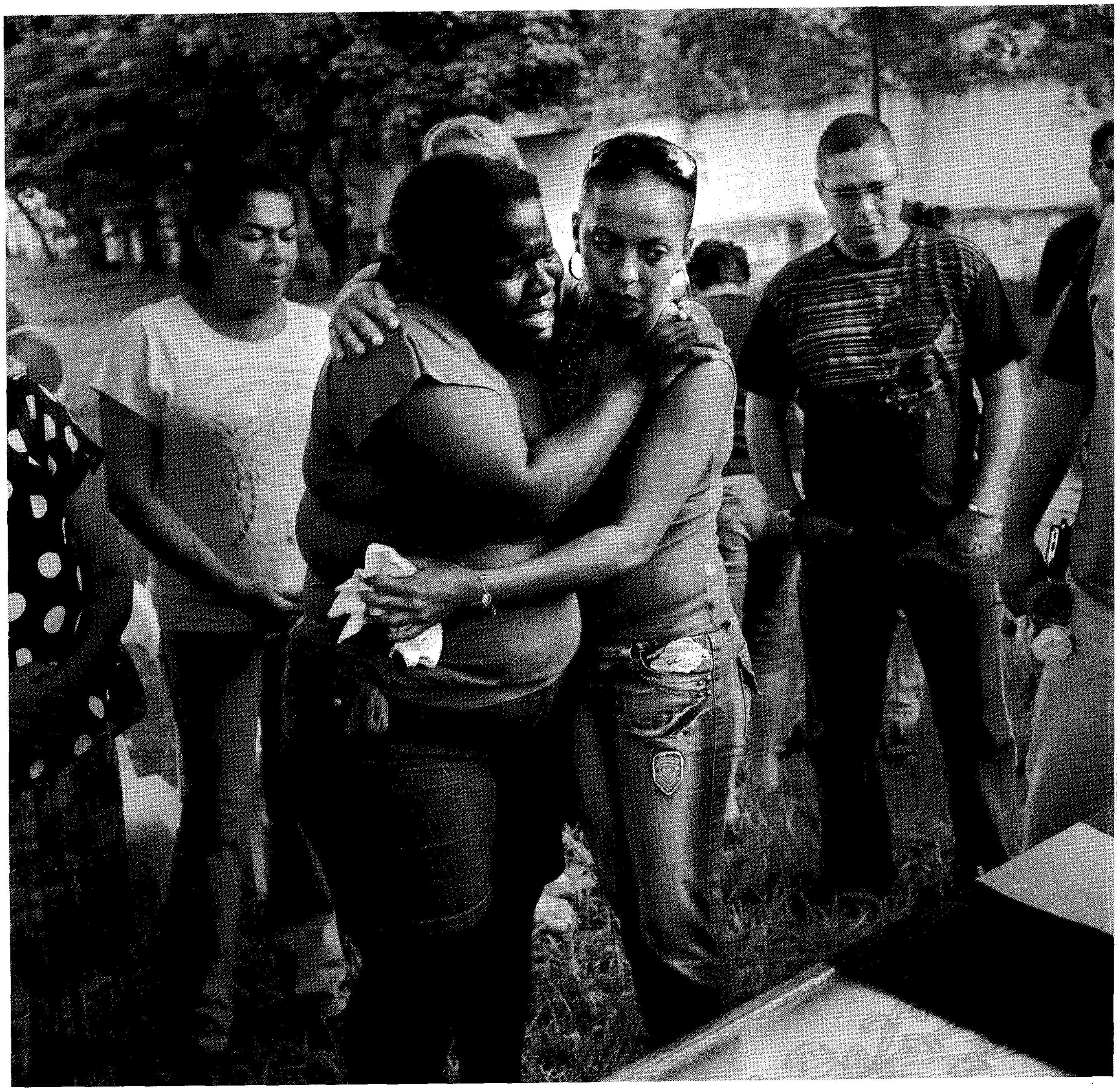
Marcelo PQD had once been boss of Morro do Dendê. But, after serving time in Bangu, he had lost his position, and switched his allegiance to a gang called the Comando Vermelho, or Red Command. He had intended to kill Fernandinho, and regain control of the favela.

The Pure Third Command started life as a breakaway faction of the Red Command, the oldest and most powerful of Rio's narco-mafias. It grew out of a prisoners' group that was formed in 1979, when common criminals and political radicals were held together at Cândido Mendes prison, on Ilha Grande, in the sea west of Rio. Cândido Mendes was Brazil's Devil's Island, where the country's military dictatorship, which ruled from 1964 until 1985, locked up guerrillas it had not already killed. More than twenty years have passed since Brazil's restoration of democracy, and there are no longer any Marxist guerrillas, although several former ones hold positions in the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The Red Command's founders picked up some organizational know-how and a few social ideas from their fellow-inmates. They even adopted the motto "Peace, Justice, and Freedom," which the gang still retains. But by the mid-nineteen-eighties the Red Command and its offshoots had abandoned any political pretensions that their leaders may have once had. The gangs today are purely criminal organizations: they exist in order to sell narcotics to fellow-Brazilians.

Unlike the export-based drug cartels in Colombia or Mexico, Rio's *bandidos* are wholesale importers—of cocaine from Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia, and of marijuana from Paraguay—as well as managers of their own retail distribution networks. At least a hundred thousand people work for the drug gangs of Rio, in a hierarchical structure that mimics the corporate world: favela chiefs are *gerentes gerais*, or general managers; their deputies are *sub-gerentes;* the top gang bosses are *donos*, or "owners."

When I visited another favela, on a hill in north Rio, a woman I'll call Cicliade, the administrator of a privately funded N.G.O. that ran a small community center, told me that the Pure Third Command controlled the hill-top, but that the hillside was the Red Command's territory. (There was an exchange of automatic-weapons fire at the beginning of my visit, which she said was a near daily occurrence.) "On the way up, it's Red Command," she said. "Up here, we can never wear red. If you see a Flamengo fan wearing one of their shirts"—Flamengo is one of the most popular Rio soccer teams—"its colors are black and red; that's O.K., but you can't wear *only* red." Cicliade gestured at her own dress, which was safely black. Once, she said, a girl came up the hill wearing red cloth-

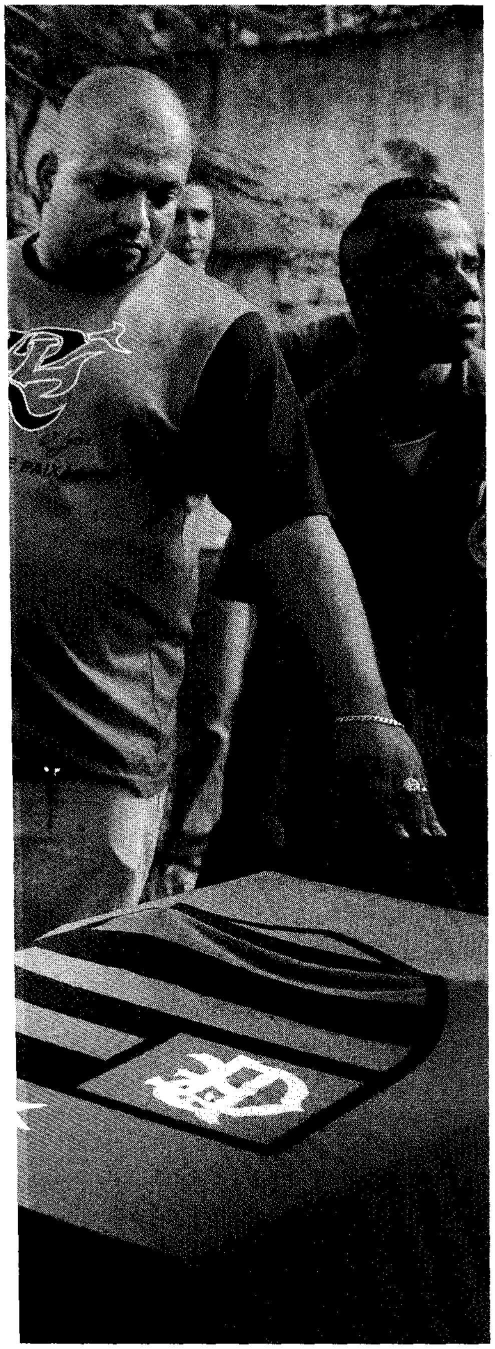


The funeral of a thirty-year-old military policeman, in the Jardim da Saudade cemetery. Ninety per cent of murders that take place in

ing. "They didn't kill her, because she was an evangelical Christian, but they cut her clothes off." Last year, in another incident, the *traficantes* had pulled out a girl's fingernails because she wore red nail polish. "So we don't use fingernail polish anymore," Cicliade said. The hilltop's gang leader was a graduate of the center's computer class, Cicliade added, and his men generally let her do her work.

The state is almost completely absent in the favelas. The drug gangs impose their own systems of justice, law and order, and taxation—all by force of arms. A black market in guns from other countries has abetted a mind-numbing level of violence. As in Mexico, many of Brazil's illegal weapons come from the United States; but Russian arms have begun to show up in recent years, and the weapons have been getting more powerful. Rio's gangsters have been caught with military-issue machine guns and anti-aircraft weapons. Semi-automatic assault rifles and hand grenades are commonplace. Fernandinho's wanted poster warns that he possesses "a Madsen machine gun." (The Madsen fires five hundred rounds a minute.)

Rio de Janeiro is the top-ranked city in the world for "violent intentional deaths." According to officials, there were just under five thousand murders last year, half of them drug-gang-related. (The numbers don't include such incidents as "rape resulting in death" or "riots resulting in death.") Twenty-two policemen were murdered. Rio's police, in turn, kill more people than police anywhere else in the world; in 2008, they acknowledged killing eleven hundred and eighty-eight people who were "resisting arrest," or slightly more than three people a day. By comparison, American police killed three hundred and seventy-one people—classified as "justifiable homicides"—in the entire United States in the same pe-



Janeiro remain unsolved.

riod. "Stray bullets" are said to kill or wound at least one person every day. By any ordinary calculus, public security in Rio de Janeiro is a disaster.

"Rio is one of the very few cities in the world where you have whole areas controlled by armed forces that are not of the state," Alfredo Sirkis, a prominent Rio politician who is also a former guerrilla, said. "Any one of the drug gangs in the smallest favela of Rio today has more weapons than we ever had," Sirkis added. "We had basically one rifle, two machine guns, and a pair of grenades. And with those we had the state in our thrall." He shook his head. "But nobody wants to make revolution anymore. What these people with the guns want today is their immediate share of the consumption culture. It's so childish, and morally childish, and they kill like children, too—like in a kids' war game." If they ever acquired an ideology, they could threaten the state, he said. "For now, they are a totally entropic and anarchic group of young people who have figured out how to get what they want, which is, basically, clothing, cars, and respect."

Indeed, what has happened in Rio applies, in varying degrees, throughout Latin America—most notably in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Colombia. Two decades after the collapse of Communism, the region's Marxist guerrillas have disappeared, only to be replaced by violent drug mafias.

Sirkis, who is in his fourth term on Rio's city council, is a tall, rangy man of fifty-eight with a mop of fair hair. His parents were Polish Jews who immigrated to Brazil after surviving the Holocaust. Sirkis was born in Rio. As a student in the late sixties, he joined the Popular Revolutionary Vanguard, an urban guerrilla group. Sirkis robbed several banks and, in separate incidents, helped kidnap the Swiss and German Ambassadors to Brazil. (The diplomats were freed unharmed after the military regime agreed to release a total of a hundred and ten political prisoners.) In 1971, as his comrades were being hunted down and killed, Sirkis fled the country. He spent almost nine years in exile, in Santiago, Buenos Aires, Paris, and Lisbon, returning after the military issued an amnesty. Sirkis went on to repudiate political violence in a best-selling book, "Os Carbonários," published in 1980. He is now an environmental activist and a leader of Brazil's Green Party, under whose banner he ran for President, in 1998.

On July 10th, one of Sirkis's son's best friends, a twenty-two-year-old university student, was murdered in Rio. His body was found in a taxi; he and the driver had both been shot; the student's sneakers were missing. Sirkis wrote a despondent letter to the editor in which he noted that this was an event of such banality that it had not even merited a news story. He told me, "The percentage of crimes solved here in Rio is ridiculous—ninety per cent of the homicides go unresolved." Part of the blame went to Brazil's "politically correct culture," he said. "It's all Scandinavian talk in an Iraqi reality. Rio is completely schizophrenic. Everybody's very p.c.—all this violence is seen as coming from some injustice. At the same time, they'd like the favelas to be atomized, à la Buck Rogers, with a Disintegrator."

Sirkis likens the spread of Rio's gang culture to Al Qaeda's appeal to disenfranchised youths in Muslim societies. "There is a culture that permits the constant reproduction of younger and younger recruits," he said. "It's a kind of self-affirmation. You have a social situation that generates a certain kind of person and creates an example that is emulated by the boys who are young, and that example is a trafficker with his AR-15 and his Nike shoes. It's a way to become a man. The girls notice him and he can fight his enemies, who are youths like him. It gives them the sentiment of allegiance."

Every year, the gangsters got younger; now some were as young as ten. It was "like a Middle Ages phenomenon, feudalism and warlordism without any purpose other than living day to day," Sirkis said. "It's a low-intensity, nonideological insurgency."

Not long after Fernandinho took control of Ilha, he and Gil—the two call themselves the "LG gang" (for their nicknames Lopes and Gil)—began making headlines in Rio's newspapers. Fernandinho's generation of *bandidos* like to party. Gang chiefs are major promoters of funk carioca, or Brazilian gangsta rap. On weekends, they throw *bailes funk,* street parties attended by youths from outside the favela—from *o asfalto,* "the asphalt," as the legally constituted parts of the city are known—and hire d.j.s. They provide beer, and sell drugs, mostly cocaine and marijuana, in great quantities. Fernandinho has been filmed partying with his "soldiers," drinking, singing, and bragging about how he dispatched his enemies. At a *baile funk* in 2005, he rapped:

Tie him up, get him down,
Go on and chop this queer.
Bring the sharp axe,
Send him to Hell.
Now you'll see,
LG has no mercy.
Get the axe down on him,

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff

"I don't want an apple, Danny—do you have any money?"

He'll be a stump.
Why'd you rat on us, you queer?

In another film clip from 2005, Fernandinho is shown at a party rapping into the microphone:

I'm filled with hate.
I'm good, but I'm not a pussy.
I tell everyone, I'm not bad to the locals, I'm not.
I hate Chorrão, PQD, and Noquinha.
If you take their side, I'll cut you to pieces.
You can go to the wrong guy. But when I catch you the Lion will eat you up.

Fernandinho's first murder warrant was issued that same year. Two dismembered bodies were found in Praia da Rosa, a nearby favela. The victims were associates of Noquinha—the rival Fernandinho had mentioned in his rap. Members of Fernandinho's gang were the main suspects in the murder of a policeman, in front of dozens of witnesses, at a religious celebration, in 2007, and in the decapitation of a Dendê man a few months later. (His infraction was having attended a *baile funk* in a rival favela.) And there were more. A local resident told me that in Praia da Rosa Fernandinho's enforcers were known as *os açougueiros*—"the butchers." "They take care of the bodies of the people they kill by chopping them up and tossing them into the bay," the man said. "The crabs eat them."

In a high-profile operation in March, 2008, a hundred armed policemen, backed by two helicopter gunships and an armored personnel carrier, came after Fernandinho. There was a shoot-out; five of Fernandinho's men were cornered in a house; several were wounded and arrested. Police said that Fernandinho had been shot but had escaped by leaping from rooftop to rooftop.

In the reports about Fernandinho—his publicity-seeking extravagances, his penchant for dismembering his enemies, his Scarlet Pimpernel-like escapes—a certain mythology began to accrue. Then there was a new story: Fernandinho had found religion. On August 20, 2007, a banner headline of the Rio tabloid *Meia Hora* said "THUG BEHEADS THOSE WHO DON'T FOLLOW HIS RULES," and, underneath, "Fernandinho Guarabu, Dendê's boss, uses an axe to execute his victims. The evangelical trafficker forbids even *macumba* in the favela." (*Macumba* refers to one of the country's African-derived religions, along with *Umbanda* and *Candomblé,* which strict evangelicals see as little more than witchcraft.) That same day, in the broadsheet *O Dia,* this report appeared: "In spite of his violence, the 'word of God' must always be propagated, sometimes in a radical way. Guarabu has supposedly banned *Umbanda* and *Candomblé* rituals, as well as spiritualist séances. At 6 P.M. every day, a pastor's prayer echoes on the narrow alleys."

What had happened was that Fernandinho had become friendly with Pastor Sidney, and had been born again. He took to his new faith with great enthusiasm. He had "Jesus Cristo" tattooed onto one of his forearms in big letters, and Morro do Dendê was soon covered with new religious graffiti. The community swimming pool he had built now had a sign above it saying "THIS BELONGS TO JESUS CHRIST." Also, Fernandinho had supposedly ordered his men not to carry out "violent" crimes, such as carjacking, armed robbery, and murder, although he was still selling drugs.

Leslie Leitão, the top crime reporter for *O Dia,* has his byline on most of the paper's stories on Fernandinho. I went to see him at the newspaper's offices. A friendly, hyperkinetic man of thirty-one—the same age as Fernandinho—Leitão explained that he often got leads on Brazil's most popular social-networking site, Orkut, which, he said, the police also trawled. Many gang members posted news, video clips, and photographs of themselves on Orkut. The girlfriend of a major *traficante* posted gossip and revealing pictures of herself. Leitão had never been to Morro do Dendê. He talked to Fernandinho on the telephone. "Of course, he denied things I had written about him," Leitão said. "But he was pretty friendly, and seemed to understand that I was just doing my job."

Brazilian journalists all but stopped going into the favelas after Tim Lopes, a well-known reporter for the O Globo television network, disappeared in 2002, after taking a hidden camera to a *baile* *funk* in a favela. Several days later, what was left of Lopes's body was found by police. He had been tortured to death—beaten, then cut into pieces with a samurai sword, then burned—by a Red Command gang leader and his men.

There are multiple sources of danger for journalists. Last year, a pair of reporters for *O Dia* and their driver were abducted and tortured for several hours inside a favela. Their torturers, who were later apprehended, turned out to be policemen, members of a vigilante "militia." Beginning about a decade ago, policemen and firefighters formed such militias in order to attack the drug gangs, murdering their members until they were wiped out. At least a hundred favelas in Rio are now in the hands of these militias, which have become gangs in their own right. (I met with a militiaman named Silva in a favela that he helped control near the Cidade de Deus—the City of God—and I asked him if there was a danger that the militias would become mafias. "They're already mafias," he said. He claimed, though, that they didn't deal drugs. Silva's expertise, I was told, was "disappearing bodies.") The sole favela in Ilha not dominated by Fernandinho, right outside the air-force base, is controlled by a militia.

"Today, if you live on Morro do Dendê, you have to count on Fernandinho," Leitão said. "If they arrest him tomorrow, Gil, his No. 2, will take over. Fernandinho is just one more dealer. How long will he be there—ten years? At most."

Leitão didn't know whether Fernandinho's religious faith was genuine or an attempt to concoct a new public image: "It could be either."

To learn more about Fernandinho, I met with a former drug dealer named Washington Luiz Oliveira Rimas, also known as Feijão—Beans. A short, plump black man of thirty-three, wearing electric-blue Nike gear and a gold chain, Feijão had been a *chefe,* a favela chief, for the Pure Third Command, but he had "retired" and tried to reinvent himself as a real-estate developer. The police still wanted him, however, and in 2006 he was arrested on a stolen-military-weapons charge. Feijão spent most of his savings on his defense and was released after a month in prison. He considered resuming "the life," but was dissuaded when a close friend was executed by the police. Feijão is now employed by an unusual N.G.O., AfroReggae, which tries to mediate between the state and the gangs, and sponsors a band.

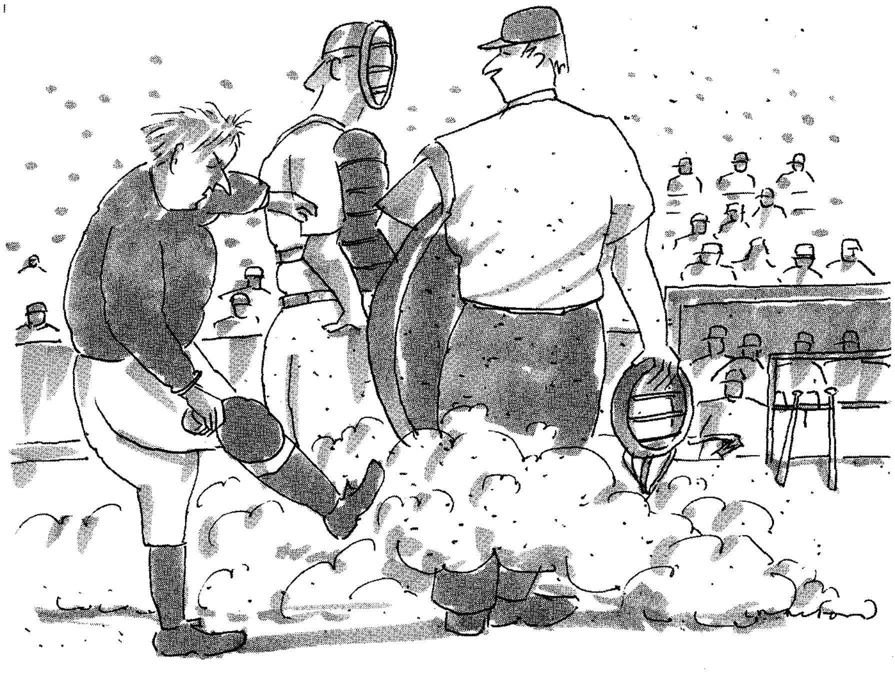
Feijão said that he has known Fernandinho for years. "Fernandinho, he's a *maluco!*"—a maniac—he said. "Fernandinho's wild. He's crazy. He smokes and drinks a lot. He parties too much. The problem is, Fernandinho is very wanted by the police. He's got a good side, but he's got a brutal side, too. He killed a lot of people and left their bodies in the streets, and he got himself into the newspapers—there are photos of him dancing with a gun on his shoulder. He has a lot of weapons up there, and stolen cars." Feijão went on, "And the thing is, here, if you do a lot of shit, they *will* come for you. And if he goes down he's not getting out."

I asked Feijão if he thought Fernandinho's highly publicized religious awakening was real. He pondered and said, "I think he probably does believe, because in this life you soon learn that only God doesn't betray you."

Pastor Sidney Espino dos Santos, the man who I was told had been responsible for Fernandinho's conversion, lives in Parque Royal, a few blocks from where Iara lives with her daughters. His home was modest and well kept, a two-story building on a dirt street. A short, burly black man with a shaved head, Pastor Sidney received me with wary politeness, and invited me inside to sit on the upstairs terrace. He wore black trousers, a well-pressed beige shirt, and a striped tie, and had a tamped-down physicality that I hadn't expected to find in a preacher.

He had been a Catholic until he was twenty-one, he said, and then became a Protestant evangelical. When I asked what had caused his conversion, Pastor Sidney looked away. He said that he had played music in a band, gone out with "a lot of women," and been "overwhelmed by anxiety and depression." Pastor Sidney is thirty-five years old, and had been married for fifteen years. He and his wife had three children. He had also been an Army paratrooper, and for most of the past twelve years had worked on offshore oil platforms as a deck supervisor. He had been to Angola several times, he said, and also to Trinidad and Tobago. His last job had ended two years earlier, after some trouble he had had with an American co-worker.

Pastor Sidney explained that he had got to know Fernandinho in 2007, when some community leaders came to see him. There had been a series of shootings involving Fernandinho and his rivals—people associated with Marcelo PQD. "It was like a war zone," Pastor Sidney said. "It was very dangerous, and the community was afraid." He had al-



"Toss me, you chump! I've got 'Little Mermaid' tickets for eight o'clock!"

ready been preaching in some of Ilha's toughest neighborhoods, and this had earned him some respect. "I was working among the *traficantes*. I was going out and praying in the streets. I approach them all the same way, as if they were possessed by demons, and found that they accepted it, because there's something supernatural about it. But I had avoided Fernandinho. I'd heard things about him that I didn't like."

Eventually, he said, "Fernandinho came to me himself. He watched me preaching. He saw people falling on the ground. And he asked me for a prayer."

Protestant evangelical sects have made astounding inroads in Brazil—traditional Catholic territory—in recent years. In some of Rio's favelas, there are scores of little churches where, night after night, the Lord is praised amid shouting and amplified music. In Pastor Sidney's church, the Igreja Assembléia de Deus Ministério Monte Sinai, he and his deacons, who include several former gangsters, sing and play instruments, creating a wall of sound that blends ska and hip-hop and Brazilian gospel rock. Parishioners dance, go into trancelike states, and fall to the ground as their demons are exorcised.

Pastor Sidney explained how it was that he could see demons: "People who are possessed tend to look at a fixed point and have a coldness around them—their eyes don't blink. The persons themselves are absent." Whenever he saw them, he would "ask Jesus to take them, and the angels come and grab the demon from them." It also helped, he said, to invoke the name of the Lord. "Traditional religious faith helps ground you, as do demonstrations of God's power."

I said I'd heard that Fernandinho had stopped killing people because of his influence. Pastor Sidney looked skeptical. Did he think that Fernandinho really believed in God? "Only God knows what's in a man's heart," he said. "But in my opinion Fernandinho is far from accepting God. He moved some—he changed a bit compared to what he was before. He uses less violence than before, he reduced his killing considerably, this is true. Before, they would come down from Dendê and rob houses and cars—now that is forbidden. Now his guys mostly just deal drugs."

But things between him and Fernandinho had deteriorated lately, he said. "We like Fernandinho, but we want to pull back from him, so that he can see what's around him and where he stands." Some men had been executed a few weeks earlier. "The killings made me feel disrespected," Pastor Sidney said. "So now I am fed up with going to Morro do Dendê. When I go up there now, I just go among the people of the community. I'm not trying to convert the *traficantes* anymore. I pray for them only if they seek me out." He was also irritated by the appearance of some rival evangelicals, who had ingratiated themselves with Fernandinho. "They are telling him what he wants to hear, not what he needs to hear." (Last week, a police raid in Praia da Rosa turned up a backpack with a rifle and ammunition, hidden in a day-care center housed in another Pentecostal church.)

I asked Pastor Sidney whether, in spite of their tensions, he might still introduce me to Fernandinho. He frowned. He didn't want to see Fernandinho yet, he said, but he would take me to Morro do Dendê and make the necessary introductions. The rest was up to me.

One night, while waiting to see Fernandinho, I rode through the city's northern suburbs with a man I'll call Célio, a former Special Forces commando. He worked for a unit of the fire department which picks up dead bodies from the streets in a vehicle called a Ravecão. (Later, Célio gave me the tally for the Ravecão that day: forty-eight bodies retrieved.)

We drove to a neighborhood where Rio's paved streets turn to dirt. There we found a couple of men in uniform under a street light, pulling a body out of the trunk of a car, with difficulty; rigor mortis had set in. A car with several men and women in it drove up behind us. It was the dead man's family. A woman got out and identified the body. The dead man was young, wearing only red underpants. As they lifted his body, a jet of blood arced some eight feet into the air out of a bullet hole in his back, perhaps in his lung. More bullets had been fired into his skull. His hands and his feet were tied behind his back, tightly, with plastic wire. He had been executed about three hours earlier.

To judge from his appearance and the way he was killed, the dead man was probably a drug dealer. His executioners were as likely to be members of one of the death squads organized by policemen or firefighters—Célio's colleagues—as they were to be *traficantes*.

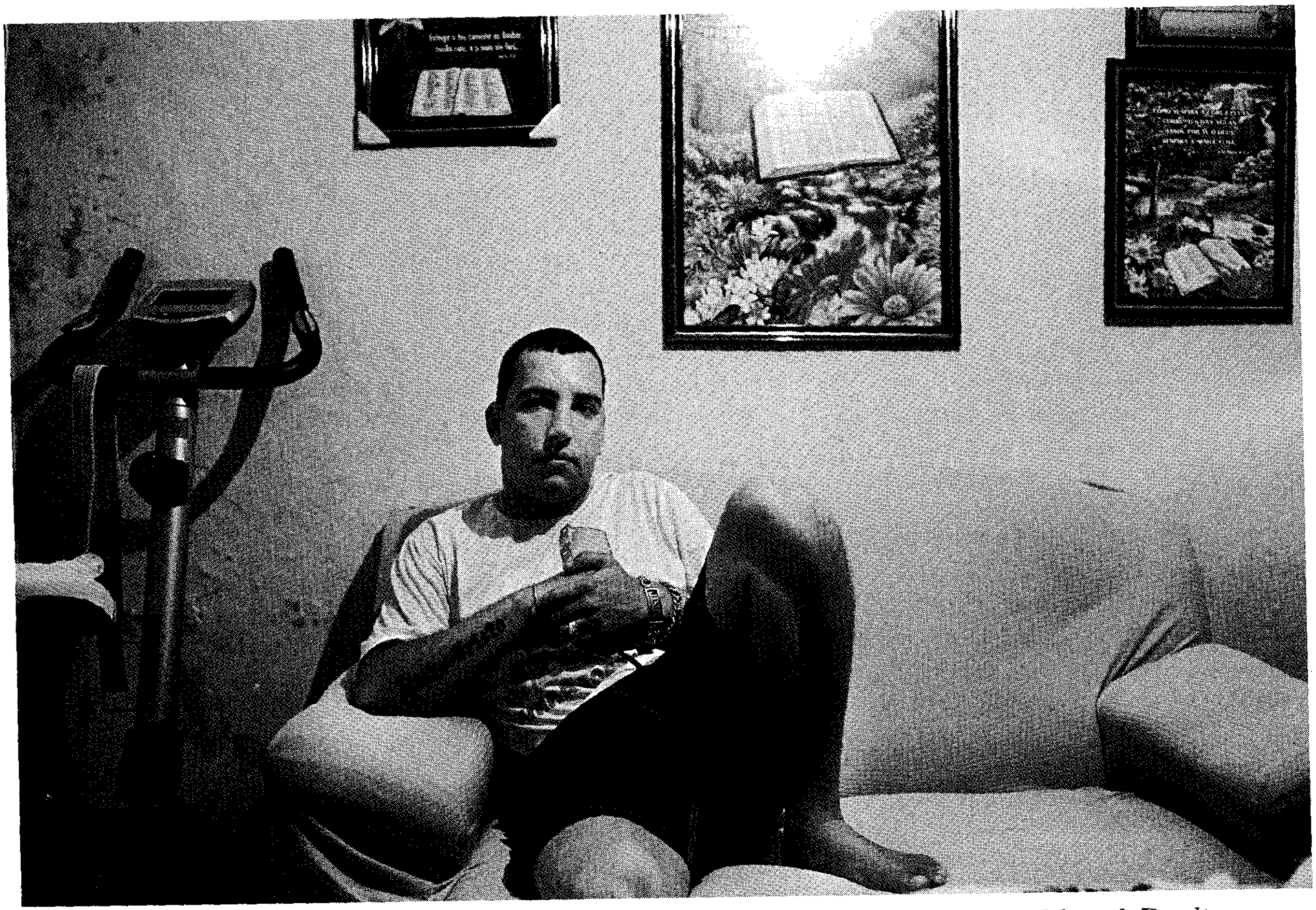
A member of Rio's civil police force, Beto, readily admitted to me that the police executed criminals. He held out his hands in appeal. "It's because we are men!" he said. "We have feelings, you know? And these guys shoot us. So there are times when I have saved lives. . . . I have seen one of my friends"—Beto mimed the movements of a policeman about to execute someone—"and I have said, 'Don't do it, leave it. Come on.' And other times I haven't been able to. There are times, you know, when you just can't. And then honestly there are times when you don't want to, you don't care."

On a daytime drive through the city, Beto kept his pistol unholstered and tucked between his legs. His police badge was his "death certificate," because if gang members found it on him they'd kill him. They regarded Rio's ten thousand civil police as only marginally better than its forty thousand military policemen. "The M.P.s are mostly really inexperienced and bad—corrupt, criminals themselves," Beto said. "The gangsters will kill them without hesitation." In his case, he said, "they might hesitate a minute, but they would still kill me."

In March, 2005, twenty-nine civilians were killed by off-duty policemen in a poor neighborhood of northern Rio. The police carried out their massacre to protest the arrest of other policemen who, in turn, had been filmed dumping the bodies of men they had murdered. There have been coördinated attacks on the police as well. In December, 2006, Red Command leaders ordered their gunmen into the city to wreak havoc. Police stations were attacked with automatic weapons and grenades; a dozen city buses were torched. At least nineteen people died.

Alfredo Sirkis, the councilman, told me, "The police are paid protection by the gangs in the favelas, and the police who aren't paid go and kill everyone and hand the operations over to another gang. The police have an extermination association with the gangs."

The problem, Sirkis said, was that the police weren't paid enough. "Every policeman, without exception, has a second job," he said. "Policemen work twenty-four hours on and seventy-two off, so there is no continuity, no professional routine. There are no foot patrols, no contact with the civilian population—they just go around in patrol cars. Seventy per cent of the policemen who are killed in Rio are killed off duty. What does this tell you?"



Fernando Gomes de Freitas, one of the most-wanted men in Rio, is able to live openly at his home in Morro do Dendê.

Thirty years ago, Sirkis said, "the *bandidos* seldom killed a policeman. And if they did they didn't get away with it. Now the police have lost all respect, and they are seen as rivals in the same business—so the *bandidos* kill them."

The first thing that needs to be done, Sirkis said, "is to end the control of drug gangs over territory in the city. Turn it back to the situation of cities everywhere, where the dealers sell their drugs on corners, but where they are not in control of territories. This can be done, but it can only be done by improving the police."

In July, I spoke to the new chief of Rio's civil police, Allan Turnowski. I asked him if the security situation in Rio was calamitous.

"Calamitous?" he said. "No. If it was, there would be no way to turn it back. And we can. This isn't Baghdad yet, or Mexico. We have the *capacity* to control any part of the city we want. The problem is we can't stay to finish the job." Turnowski spoke boosterishly about a campaign to combat the police-linked militias; his plans to increase the number of police officers; and hopes of improving training and salaries. He mentioned a recently cleaned-up and walled-off favela, Santa Marta, where the government had invested in infrastructure, as a model for the future. I pointed out that Santa Marta was only one favela, and there were a thousand or more others still unattended. He nodded, and said, "It will take time."

Pastor Sidney led the way to his car, a late-model Chevrolet Meriva. We drove through the streets of Ilha. After turning off a residential street, we entered an unlit corner of a favela. Pastor Sidney had switched on the interior lights and rolled down all the windows, so that we could be seen. At the first crossing, youths with pistols and assault rifles blocked the car. They wore baseball caps and T-shirts with athletic logos, surfer shorts, and rubber flip-flops. They came up to the window and, recognizing Pastor Sidney, gave us a thumbs-up.

A curious ritual ensued. One after the other, each gunman handed his weapon to a comrade and then came to Pastor Sidney's open window. Each would stand there with his hands at his sides and his eyes closed and, as Pastor Sidney spoke to him in loud, rapid-fire Portuguese, making some kind of Biblical invocation, would go into a trance. Pastor Sidney would then reach out and, laying a hand on the gunman's forehead, yell, "*Sai!*"—"Leave!"—repeatedly. Finally, he would blow hard at them, or mock-whack their heads, at which point they would come to, open their eyes in a startled way, and smile dumbly, thanking the pastor.

Throughout these proceedings, one of the youths always remained at the guard post—a plastic chair and an oil drum—at the entrance to the alley. The guard had a weapon, too, and a large plastic bag open in front of him, filled with packets of cocaine. It was a *boca de fumo*—a "mouth of smoke," Brazilian slang for a spot where drugs are sold.

We drove slowly down the alleyway, past men and women who had to squeeze against the walls for us to get through. I smelled marijuana and, once or twice, the burning-rubber whiff of crack. We were stopped again; Pastor Sidney repeated his exorcism ritual. We drove into a big dirt plaza—we were in Praia da Rosa, and there were gunmen everywhere. The atmosphere was tense; something was going on. (I found out later that the Rat, one of Fernandinho's *sub-gerentes* in another favela, had come to seek justice that night from Leo, one of Fernandinho's *gerentes*—and Iara's direct boss—because one of Leo's soldiers had gone to his turf and pulled a gun on him. Leo made his man apologize to the Rat, averting bloodshed.)

After three more checkpoints, we came to a junction where the street divided, running along both sides of a wall painted with messages about Jesus. We had arrived in Morro do Dendê.

The drug dealers greeted Pastor Sidney with deference, and asked if he was going to see the *chefe*. "No. I'm only coming this far," he said. "He knows why." They looked nonplussed, but nodded. Pastor Sidney said that he wanted someone "responsible" to take me to see Fernandinho. The men conferred; one went away and spoke into a radio. Then a corpulent, bare-chested man in his late thirties stepped forward. Pastor Sidney told me, "It's O.K., you can go with him. You're in your own home." He drove away.

The man led me up a steep street, past curious onlookers. At the top of the hill, he stopped and motioned for me to wait for him, and then vanished. There were a few armed men in sports clothes across the street; people were coming up and buying cocaine from them. *Baile funk* lyrics blared: "You're not worth the dick you suck," and then the refrain, repeated over and over, "*Pau que chupa, pau que chupa.*" "Dick you suck, dick you suck."

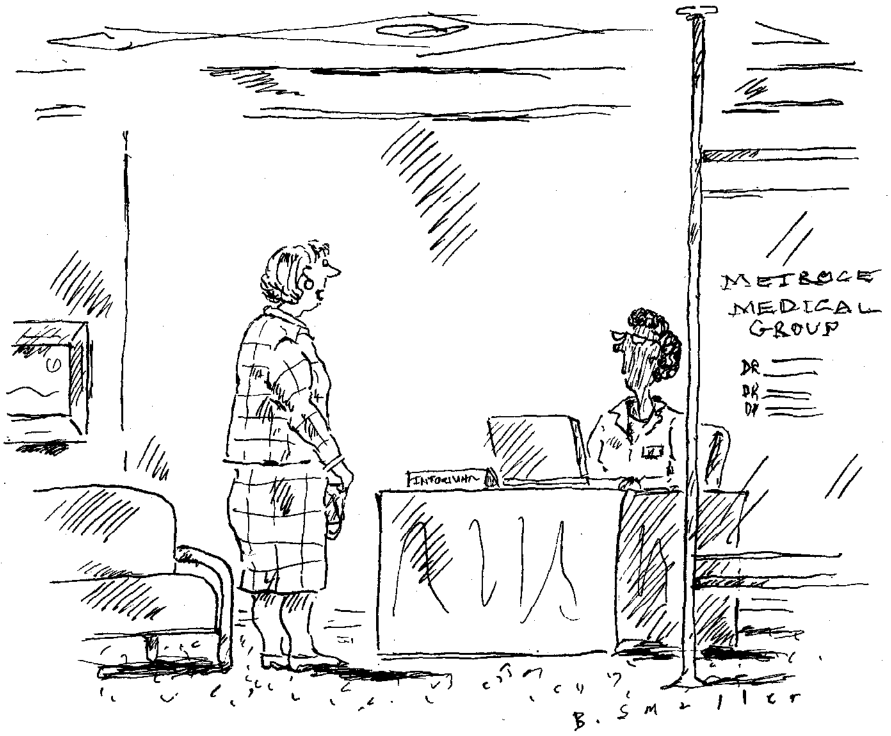
Fernandinho appeared. Six bodyguards holding assault weapons fanned out around him. I recognized him from a photograph; he had the Jesus Christ tattoo on his right forearm in big Gothic letters. He was wearing a baseball cap and shorts and a sleeveless São Paulo soccer jersey emblazoned with the letters "LG," the logo of its corporate sponsor. He wore a huge gold-link chain and pendant around his neck, oversized gold rings on most of his fingers, and a heavy gold wristwatch. Everything sparkled with diamonds.

He was white, boyish-looking, of medium height and build, with close-cropped brown hair. He greeted me amiably. He suggested that we go to his home for a chat. His bodyguards moved with us. They were all teen-agers, and they carried AK-47s and AR-15s. We went down some stairs, then an alleyway, made a couple of turns, entered a house, and walked along a narrow hallway, and into Fernandinho's bedroom.

It was not particularly large; his bed occupied most of the available space, and it was covered with a cartoon-character bedspread. There were shiny religious stickers, and several framed Psalms on the walls. In one corner was an aquarium; in another was an exercise bike. A big plasma television dominated the wall opposite the bed. Fernandinho sat on the edge of the mattress and cleared some clothing off a small sofa next to it, so that I could sit there. His bodyguards stayed down the hall.

A pretty young pregnant woman came to offer us something to drink. After she left, I asked Fernandinho if she was his wife, or if she was pregnant with his child. No, she was just a friend—his wife wasn't there, he said, and then corrected himself. "We haven't been properly married." He had six children, with two more "on the way." He said that his wife, who was pregnant with their first child, didn't know about any of the children except the oldest one, a boy who was in primary school, in the *asfalto*. He looked at me questioningly, and said that he'd been considering telling her about the other children after she'd given birth. I said that it would probably be a wise move.

His function in Morro do Dendê was not that different from a mayor's, Fernandinho said. "People come to me with their problems and I look after them." He handed me the gold pendant he was wearing. It showed a palm tree—*dendê* is Portuguese for the African oil palm—and a few houses clinging to a hill. It was the symbol of his office. "I designed it myself," he said. "It weighs



"I want a doctor I can relate to—someone who's at least fifteen pounds over his ideal weight."

half a kilo." He was a trafficker, yes, but he sold drugs only because others consumed them. I mentioned the murders for which he was notorious. He said that he did not have to kill people himself—there were people who carried such things out on his behalf.

"As a boy, I wanted to be a soccer player," he said. "Eventually, I realized that was just a fantasy." He had joined the gang as a runner and a lookout when he was eight or nine. I asked him if he could imagine his life being any different from what it was now, whether he could be capable of changing it. "No," he said. "I have so many arrest warrants against me, I can't even leave the favela." He had not been out of Morro do Dendê for two years, and had been out only twice before that since 2003.

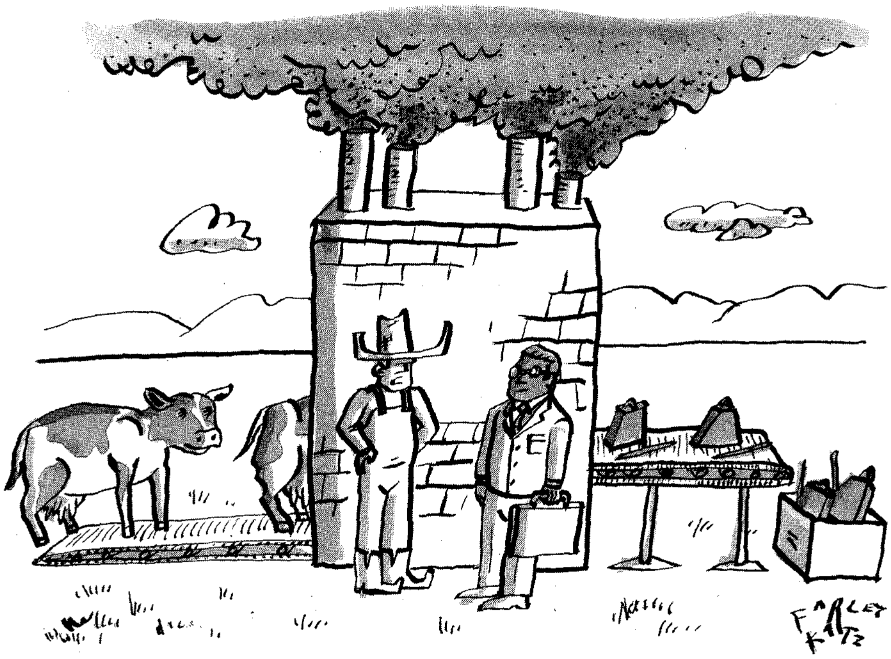
What crimes was he wanted for? "Everything, even if it isn't true," he said.

Fernandinho kept his television switched on. It was tuned to the Brazilian version of the Discovery Channel, which was airing a true-crime docudrama about the so-called Sleepwalker Killer. A reënactment in which a man walked into a bedroom and bludgeoned a sleeping couple was played repeatedly in slow motion. Eventually, Fernandinho flipped to a local news station. It was broadcasting live footage of a shootout between criminals and policemen in São Paulo.

"Is that what's it's like?" I asked. "Yeah, sometimes," Fernandinho said. But he tried to avoid confrontations with the police, he said. Whenever possible, he and his men went into hiding when the police invaded the favela.

Fernandinho opened the door of his wardrobe and rummaged around. At length, he produced two bottles of men's cologne, still in their boxes. One was Issey Miyake, and the other was Givenchy Pour Homme. "Take them," he said. "They're yours."

He prayed a great deal, he said, and he even prayed for his enemies. As if to demonstrate the truth of his claim, he closed his bedroom door, went to the edge of his bed, and got down on his knees. He prayed like a child, with his hands clasped, his eyes closed, and his lips moving in murmured prayer. He went and found his Bible and, sitting in front of me on his bed, he opened it to a page where he had a tassel marker, about a quarter of the way in. He said that he was determined to read all the way through.



"Nobody said the cowbell industry was humane."

I congratulated Fernandinho for his effort. But then, pointing out the contradiction between his religious faith and his continued life as a drug trafficker, I asked, "For you, where is the dividing line between right and wrong?"

Fernandinho smiled, and said, "Who's deciding?"

A couple of days later, I returned to Parque Royal to see Pastor Sidney. He invited me to a meal of *feijoada*, a traditional Brazilian stew of pork and black beans, in a tiny restaurant he owned on the square of the favela. He asked me how the meeting with Fernandinho had gone. I said that Fernandinho had spoken a lot about his religious faith.

Pastor Sidney nodded. I sensed that he might be willing to talk more explicitly about his feud with the gangster. "What happened?" I asked him. "I thought Fernandinho had promised to stop the killing."

"Yes, and that's why I am staying away from him, because he's broken his word."

He blamed Gil, Fernandinho's deputy. Gil had been in the hospital, and while he was gone things had been good. Then Gil had returned. Pastor Sidney said, "He's very bloodthirsty. I foresaw it, and told Fernandinho that within a week the killings would start again. And, within a week, they did." Pastor Sidney had heard through the grapevine that four informants had been captured and condemned to death. He had rushed up to Morro do Dendê to try to save their lives. He had gone to see Fernandinho, but his bodyguards had said that the boss was resting, and couldn't be disturbed. He had asked about the detained men, and they had told him, "Don't worry." He went away.

Later, he heard that they'd been killed, and he felt betrayed. "I went to Fernandinho and told him that the alliance we had made was broken," Pastor Sidney said. "For two years, they had made a vow that no one would be killed. I reminded him that during that time none of *them* had been killed or been arrested." Pastor Sidney went on, "I predict some of them will be killed soon."

"What did Fernandinho say?"

"He didn't respond at all. I could see the demons coming back into his eyes."♦

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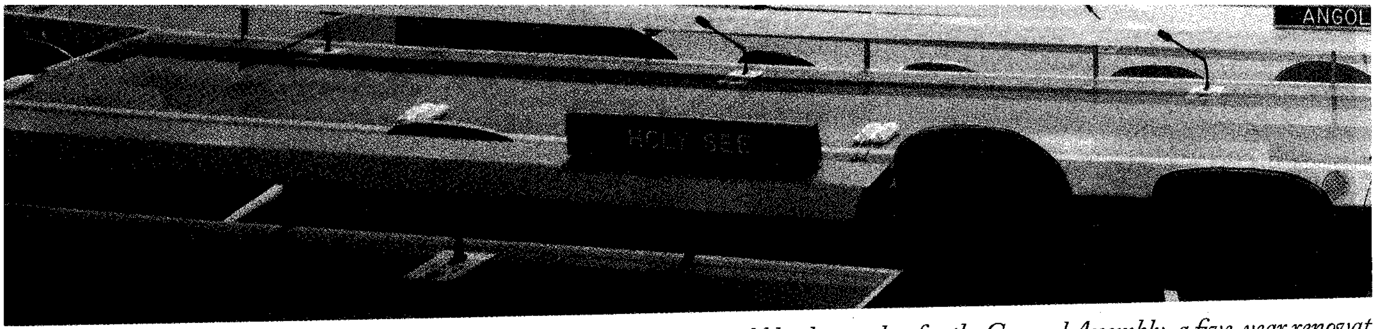
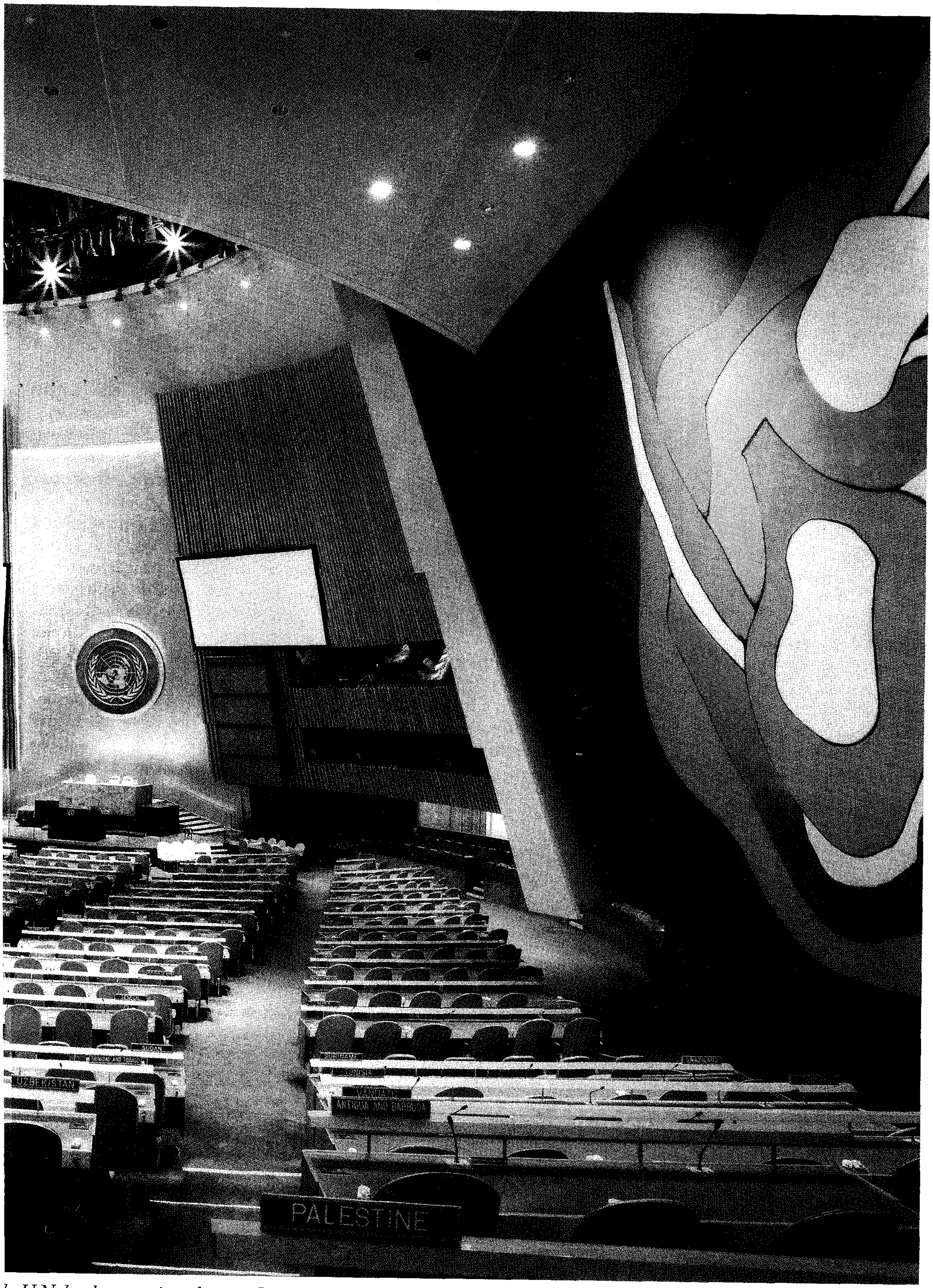
Audio slide show: the favelas of Rio.



SHOWCASE *The General Assembly Hall of the United Nations. As world leaders gather for the General Assembly, a five-year renovat*


SUDAN
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
UZBEKISTAN
SURINAME
SWAZILAND
VANUATU
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
PALESTINE

he U.N. headquarters is under way. Photograph by Robert Polidori. Visit newyorker.com for an audio slide show.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

HAPPY HANEKE

Michael Haneke and his movies.

BY ANTHONY LANE

A Bavarian Sunday in late summer: warm, wet, and thunderstruck. A small crowd gathered in the Promenadeplatz, at the heart of Munich, around a stone plinth to which cards and posters had been stuck: "Michael: I miss and love you so much." "We will love you forever." Close by was the entrance to the Hotel Bayerischer Hof, the grandest hideaway in town, where the film director Michael Haneke was receiving visitors. How did the fans know he was here? And was it not bizarre that this most unyielding of creative intellects, the dean of unsmiling cinema, should be stalked in such a way? Haneke is admired, and even revered, but lapped in these waves of love?

As a frail warbling rose around the plinth, all became clear: Wrong Michael. These were Jackson fans, drawn to the hotel where their beloved, now deceased, had stayed for his last German appearance. Whether they would, at this juncture, be prepared to switch Michaels was open to question, Haneke not being the first man you go to in a bid to heal the world and make it a better place. On the other hand, what poise he radiates: the kind of calm, in bearing and garb, of which twitchy superstars can only dream. His long, serene features could have been borrowed from an icon of the Orthodox church. He has a white beard, rimless spectacles, and a full head of silvery hair, parted at the center and sweeping down to his collar at the back; his tall frame tends to be draped in a soft dark suit, often matched with a black shirt, as if to thicken the hint of the ecclesiastical. The real surprise, when you meet the man, is the rich, ripened bass of the voice, and the even deeper wealth of the laugh—a generous thrum, welling, you might suppose, from an instinctive wish to savor the pleasures of life, not merely to snort at the iniquities. Haneke, who has a wife, Susanne, and four children, is sixty-seven, but he could pass for a decade less. Strange to say, but the guy who made "Hidden" and "The Piano Teacher" looks ready to burst into song.

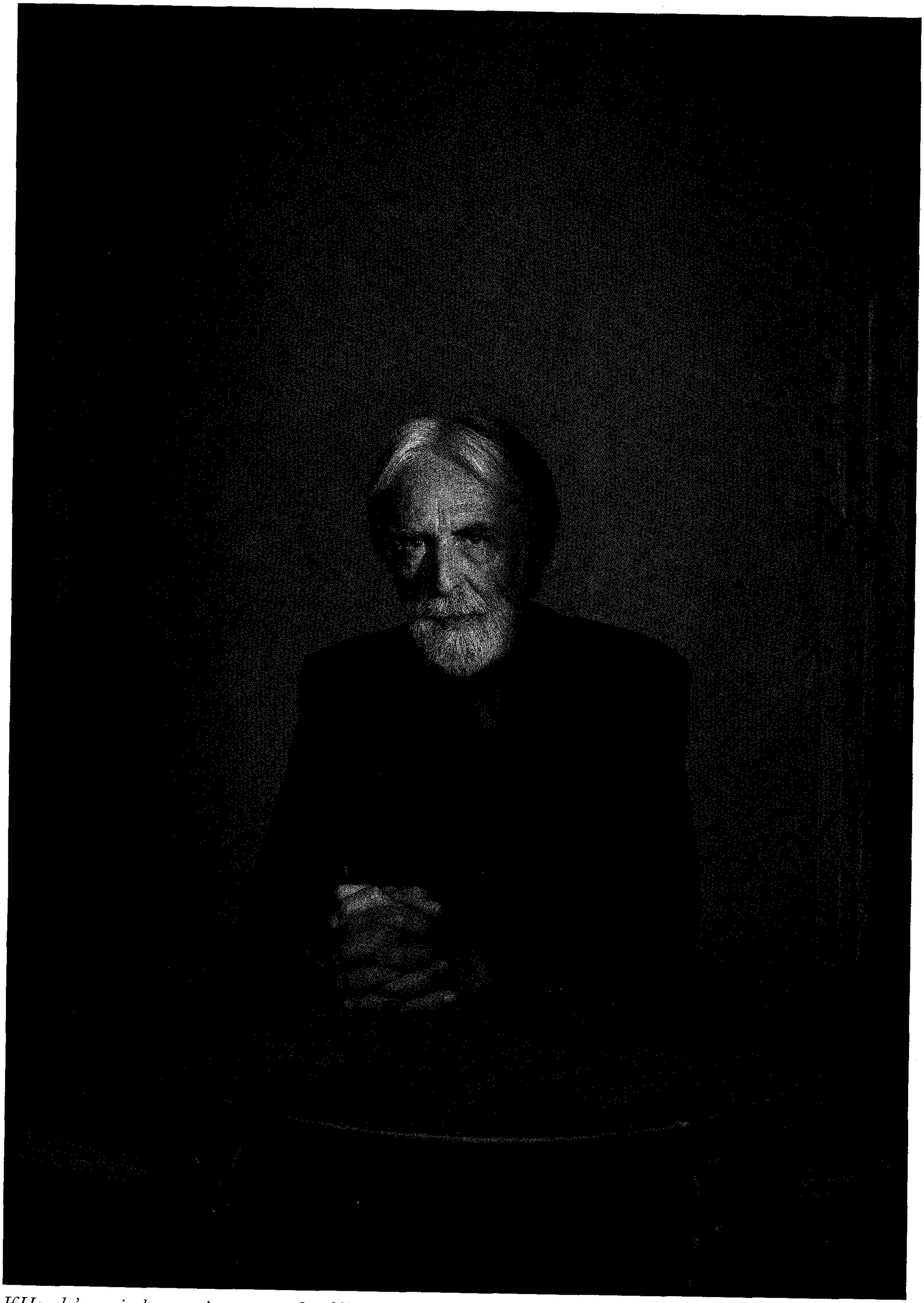
Just once, I saw him do so. Not for the Jacksonites, but downstairs, in one of the hotel restaurants, on the succeeding night. Underneath the arches of a cellar, we were ushered to a private room: a facsimile of a drinkers' snug at the back of a hunting lodge, all rough-hewn wood and darkly panelled walls. Haneke took the whole thing in his stride, ducking through the threshold, singing, "*Yo-de-laay-eee-oh!*," and settling down to feast. As someone who splits his time between Vienna and Paris, he likes to trim his dining to his location, so *Nürnberger Schweinwürstl*—the cigar-shaped sausage of the region—it had to be. Offered a clutch of six, eight, or ten, he took the last, cast mild aspersions on the hill of sauerkraut in which they sat, and washed them down with tall doses of the local Pils, diverting smoothly, as night wore on, to glasses of Chianti. He was a bon vivant at work, and therefore at play. Though an Austrian, Haneke was born here, in Munich, in 1942. In a sense, he was at home.

As I bade farewell, I couldn't help remembering another meal: A full-on blowout, buoyed by champagne, the table stacked with cheeses, cured meats, and other *bonnes bouches*. The diners—a married couple and their young daughter—help themselves to one tidbit after another, as if this were their last meal on earth. And so it is. Fortified by foodstuffs, the family set about destroying their house, the father burying a hatchet in the furniture, the mother ripping up shirts and splitting LPs in half like crackers. A tropical fish flaps and gasps beside its smashed aquarium. The phone is muffled. The daughter looks on. Later, she is given a sleeping draught, and then a lethal injection. The mother is next to go, gulping down her overdose; the father is last, lying down beside his wife and child on the bed, amid the ruins of their home, lit only by the fizzy glow of the TV.

There endeth "The Seventh Continent," a Michael Haneke film from 1989. Based on a real case of familial suicide, it was his first feature film, after seven works for television. It is also his first masterpiece; nobody could mistake it for entertainment, but the director could easily be mistaken for a tragedian of long standing, so expert is his pacing of the horrors. The question to be put, therefore, on viewing everything from "The Seventh Continent" to Haneke's latest film, "The White Ribbon," in which the expertise has risen to a tranquil mastery, is as follows: What is the tie that binds the man with the big guffaw to this compendium of terror and dismay? What's a nice guy like him doing in films like this?

As a rough rule, cinema can be sundered into two halves: six-o'clock films and nine-o'clock films. Most movies are nine-o'clock affairs, and none the worse for it. You get home from work, grab something to eat, head to the theatre, and enjoy the show. And so to bed—alone or entwined, but, either way, with dreams whose sweetness will not be crumbled or soured by what you saw onscreen. A six-o'clock movie requires more organization: prebooked tickets, a restaurant table, the right friends. You're going to need them, because if all runs according to plan you will spend the second half of the evening tossing the movie—the impact and the substance of it—back and forth. So "Persona" is a six-o'clock movie, though it won't leave you with much of an appetite. As is "The Deer Hunter," whereas "Platoon," for all its sound and fury, works fine for nine o'clock. "The Reader" is a nine-o'clock movie that thinks it's a six-o'clock. "Groundhog Day" is the opposite. And "The White Ribbon"? A six-o'clock movie, if ever I saw one.

Until now, it has breathed little but



If Haneke's movies leave a viewer uncomfortable, he says, "that's because I respect him." Photograph by Dan Winters.

the rarefied air of festivals, among them Cannes (where it won the Palme d'Or), Moscow, Toronto, and the always popular Espoo. Here it will show on October 7th and 8th, as part of the New York Film Festival. Come December, it will go into general release, though the chances of its landing in your local multiplex are slim—no great loss, in the eyes of the director, for whom the modern movie theatre is a pullulating mosh pit. "I hate the smell of popcorn," he told me, adding, "I rarely go to the cinema. I went to see the new Jonathan Demme film, 'Rachel Getting Married,' *pas mal*, and there was this couple behind us who talked the whole time. They got up. They snacked. The spectators seem to have lost respect for the film."

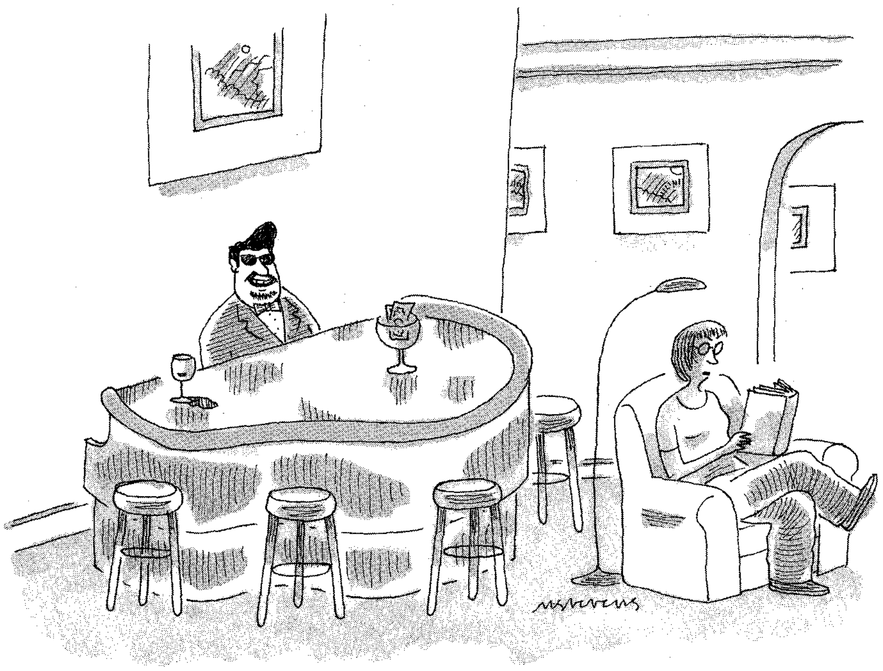
But what if the movie is a blast? Don't viewers have a right to respond in kind? "To see a comedy, it's good to be in a community," Haneke said. "But for anything else . . ." He shrugged. As for the togetherness of moviegoing, the glue that has held together a million Saturday nights, "*Je m'en fous*." (Politely translated, "Screw that.") Every cinéaste is also a nostalgist—however primed for the next big thing, you cannot help but compare it with the Arcadia of your early days beneath the projector's beam, and to the mistier glories of cinema's own youth—and Haneke is no exception. When he was growing up, he says, and seeking out the new Godard, people went to see "serious movies in a serious way."

I guess you could try going into "The White Ribbon" with a bucket of popcorn, but after a few minutes you would leave it at your feet and let the movie lock you tight, a willing captive, inside its extraordinary world. The dimensions of that world are exact: A village in northern Germany, viewed over the course of the seasons from 1913 to 1914. The countryside is flat but fertile, with the villagers joined in celebration of the harvest, and the social geology retains—perhaps for the last time, given the looming war—the feudal strata laid down by the encrustations of time, with a haughty baron presiding over the district, and a subsidiary layer of educated professionals. It is these people, and their families, who really interest Haneke: the pastor, the schoolteacher, and the Chekhovian doctor, with his trim beard, his cowed housekeeper, and the amused, languid cynicism of one who has seen too much of life to be gratified by this backwater, or its meagre trickle of thrills.

"The White Ribbon" is Haneke's most approachable film, though you approach it at your peril, as you would a sleeping animal, or a hot stove. It is also his longest, his most beautiful—the only one in black-and-white—and his best. His broadest, too, in the confidence with which it ranges up and down the social scale. Something pestilential is at large: a rash of misdemeanors, some trivial, others twisted and grave. An estate worker is found hanging in his shed, but the life of his master, too, seems weighed down, with his young son kidnapped and suspended upside down in a barn, and his wife, the graceful baroness, leaving him for less oppressive climes. Some of the transgressions remain unfathomable, as if the motives behind them were mysterious even to the perpetrators: a wire stretched between trees to snag a horse, or a pet bird laid on the minister's desk, a pair of scissors plunged into its neck to create a makeshift cross. If these are symbols, they are not easy to read; if they are grievances, you wonder what triggered them; and if they have the calculated look of early performance art—a surreal notion, in this provincial setting—then who are the performers?

Nobody schooled in Haneke will be amazed to learn that the puzzle goes unsolved. If Hercule Poirot had happened to drop by the village, he would have fumed with uncertainty and left with a drooping mustache. Haneke is not setting problems for what Poirot used to call our little gray cells; he is more concerned with inserting the worm of unease into our guts, and asking how much we can trust our big red hearts. His 2005 hit, "Hidden," was marketed as a thriller, and pulses duly throbbed at the tale of a Parisian couple, played by Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche, who receive videotapes of the outside of their house, and at the husband's efforts to track down whoever is sending them—a path that winds back to his own treacherous past. But, though both he and the audience believe that he gets his man, is it the right man? No one confesses, and we are left with the famous final shot, showing the exterior of the school attended by the couple's child: somebody—a person unknown and unapprehended—could be keeping the school under surveillance, and gearing up for the next level of threat. You find yourself searching every face among the pupils, like an anxious parent looking for your own lost child.

More than anything, this paying of attention—simple but scrupulous, onscreen and off—is what melds Haneke to his work. "It was like he was *scanning* me." So says Juliette Binoche, who starred for Haneke not just in "Hidden" but in the exemplary "Code Unknown," five



"Any requests, babe, before I call it a night?"

years earlier. Speaking of their first collaboration, she told me, "He saw exactly where I was, and he could see inside." Wasn't that intrusive, or unnerving? "No, it feels funny, wonderful," she replied, then added, "But it's like there's no escape." Binoche's praise of Haneke comes close to the nub of the complaint that has been voiced against him, by some critics and many outraged viewers: that, even as he shows human beings forcing themselves on one another, he is visiting the same cruelty, and the same slow squeezes of control, on performers and spectators alike. Binoche recalls the sequence in "Code Unknown" when she had to strike a child: "It was very hard to slap the little boy. Michael didn't want to involve himself too closely. He told me, 'It's O.K.' But I could see in the little boy's eyes that it was a kind of humiliation. I asked him to slap me first, but he wouldn't."

"I lined the pockets myself."

Put like that, it is a damning account: perfect ammunition for Haneke's detractors and foes. But Binoche is a good friend of his, and she understands the reserve that others read as *froideur*. "He needs that uncomfortable place," she told me, adding, "He likes to provoke. Film for him is an active medium, not *sedative*. He wants to wake you up." Something about the slapping scene, however, resounds with a deeper hurt. As Haneke said to me, "You can show all the shortcomings of a society through its children, because they are always on the bottom rung. So are animals. They are those who can't defend themselves. They are predestined victims." And then he told me a story: "Once, I bawled out a lady in a train. She was with her child, who was a bit stressed, and she took him out of the compartment to hit him, because she didn't dare to do it inside. And even though I had no right to do so, I went and bawled her out, because that is something I just cannot stand."

The odd thing is that he told the tale again, the next day. Haneke is fluent and diverse in conversation—we spoke in a mixed Euro-salad of French, English, and German—and this was the only anecdote to which he returned, as though unable to shake off a persistent ache. If he failed to interfere in the scene with Binoche and the boy, it was not because he didn't care. On the contrary, it was precisely because, like a surgeon, he was delving so close to the source of the malady—to the worst habits of a wicked world—that he had no option other than to stay cool. Some of us meet our fears in dreams, others in therapy, or by shutting our eyes and praying that they won't come true; whereas Haneke, in Binoche's words, "is working with fear, like a brush."

Few movies of recent years, for example, have been more violent—or have *seemed* more violent, for little overt brutality is shown—than the two versions of "Funny Games," in which a pair of white devils in tennis gear invade and torment one well-to-do family after another, on the shores of a quiet lake. Yet these almost unwatchable works were made by a man who, as he admitted to me, is gripped by "a horror of all violence." Even student unrest put Haneke in a funk. "In 1968, I was on the streets, and at the first sight of the police I was off like a shot," he recalled. "There was this police phalanx, with shields and batons, and I ran like a madman."

"Where was this?" I asked.

"Baden-Baden," he replied. Oh, *that* hellhole.

Haneke then reached for a more distant incident from his youth. "There was a moment with my uncle, who was this huge man. I thought he was going to hit me, so I pushed him"—he mimed the action—"and he fell over." Haneke mimed that, too; it looked like a tree being felled. I couldn't decide whether he was mortified at the memory of the Goliath whom he slew or whether, decades on, he still felt the secret surge of that power, and I started, like a teacher, to take a roll call of all the kids in his work. I thought of the adolescents, ignored by their elders, in "Lemmings," a two-part film for TV, made in 1979; of the doomed daughter in "The Seventh Continent"; of the title character in "Benny's Video" (1992), who murders a fellow teen-ager and tapes the deed; of the young girl befriended by the pathetic hero of "The Rebellion" (1992), whose face he conjures up in his prison cell; of the illegal Romanian refugee in "71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance" (1994), chewing on leftover food from Viennese garbage bins; of the boy whose demise, in "Funny Games" (1997) and its remake, "Funny Games U.S." (2007), is no less unspeakable for being unseen; of the brother and sister shepherded through a twilit land by their mother in "Time of the Wolf" (2003); of the son whose school we see in "Hidden," and who shoves his mother away when she attempts too close an embrace; and of the ominous troupe of

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youth in "The White Ribbon," who become much more than victims. And then I thought of the young Michael Haneke, maturing in the wake of the Second World War, and wondered what he must have witnessed and endured.

"I grew up with three women: my grandmother, my mother, and my aunt. It was *great*." Haneke gives his heartiest laugh to date, and you can't blame him. He appears to have been born into a Fellini movie. "I had a very spoiled childhood. I didn't have to fight with a man—it was *super-agréable*," he says. "I was never beaten." It was his grandmother who took him to his first film, Laurence Olivier's "Hamlet." Haneke remembers, "I was crying so much after five minutes that I had to leave." Sitting in the hotel, sixty years or so after the event, he drops into a droning, haunting ghost moan: a highly convincing impersonation of Hamlet's dead father on the battlements.

Fritz Haneke, Michael's father, was an actor and theatre director, and a Protestant. His mother, Beatrix von Degenschild, was an actress, and a Catholic. Only someone from a mixed-faith background, perhaps, can combine such a pointed interest in the lure of religion with such a sturdy refusal to commit to either side, although if I were Catholic I might take a furtive satisfaction in the way that "The White Ribbon" puts the moral sternness of the northern church through the wringer. (The film, Haneke says, "is not against religion, and yet the rigorousness in Protestantism is very much a part of how it can lead to radicalism.") Fritz left when Michael was still young, and he was taken across the border and raised in his aunt's home in Wiener Neustadt, a suburb of Vienna. His mother performed in the Burgtheater in the capital. "They were putting on 'The Prodigal,' and there was this fairy," he told me. It was his mother. "She was brought down through the air, onto the stage, and I saw her, and I screamed out loud, '*Das ist Mama!*,' and the whole theatre started to laugh."

This is the second time in one afternoon that Haneke has referred to his mother in such terms. Earlier, he had said that, as a treasured visitor, she would descend on weekends, "like a fairy." When I point out the coincidence, Haneke is much amused. "She was a very, very good-looking woman," he says, a sublime explanation. It is almost as if he were summoning the memory of a picture book, or a scrap of folklore, instead of a true event. The vanished father, the winged mother appearing from on high to bestow her blessing, and then the curious aftermath, in which the infant grows to manhood and presents us with a bestiary of the monstrous and the icily indifferent: even the Brothers Grimm might have balked at such a plot.

Haneke's mother remarried. Her son didn't know what to do with himself. "I wanted to be a pianist. I wasn't very good in school because I was practicing piano," Haneke told me. "My stepfather was a composer and a conductor, and, thank God, he realized early on that I wasn't talented enough. There is nothing more depressing than a mediocre musician." Next came acting. He went for an audition in Vienna: "They didn't take me, and I was furious." The insult was all the worse because he had tried the piece out on his mother: "She found it fabulous, and I was so sure that everybody would find it fabulous that I couldn't *believe* they didn't take me." At college, in Vienna, he studied theatre, but dropped it after a semester, on the ground of boredom, and switched to philosophy. There was a distinguished Hegelian on the faculty: "I thought he would explain the world to me, but I understood it's not the case." Anyway, Haneke had better things to do: like Truffaut, he was going to the movies three times a day. "All my stock of films is from this time," he says.

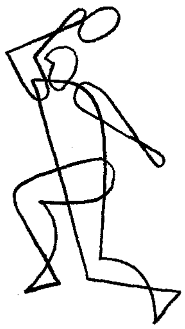
Here, as recounted in the magazine *Sight & Sound* in 2002, are Haneke's favorite movies: "Au Hasard, Balthazar" (Bresson), "Salò" (Pasolini), "The Gold Rush" (Chaplin), "Mirror" (Tarkovsky), "A Woman Under the Influence" (Cassavetes), "The Exterminating Angel" (Buñuel), "Germany, Year Zero" (Rossellini), "Lancelot du Lac" (Bresson), "L'Eclisse" (Antonioni), "Psycho" (Hitchcock). It's quite a list, and hard to quarrel with: the best Tarkovsky, the best Buñuel, and Antonioni at his most uncompromising, with a climax that could be Haneke. I would prefer a more fair-weather Hitchcock, and would trade the second Bresson for another, probably "A Man Escaped," but these rosters are designed for quibbling. (Haneke himself now says that he would swap the Antonioni for "The Mouth Agape," Maurice Pialat's fearsome film about a mother dying of cancer.) The Pasolini is less of a movie, more of a guide to the filthier circles of Hell, but that, presumably, is what attracted Haneke. He first saw it at the age of twenty: "I was completely destroyed. I was sick, destabilized for two weeks." That is not what most people want from the movies. It is, however, what most people get from their love affairs, or from the wrenching end of them, and the lesson learned from Haneke's scarifying Top Ten—needless to say, the Chaplin he picks is the one with attempted cannibalism—is that a movie that leaves you unchallenged, or unbruised, is somehow neglecting its duty. "If 'Funny Games' leaves a viewer uncomfortable, that's *because* I respect him," he said.

For a while, it was the viewers of theatre, not cinema, to whom Haneke attended. He began directing plays in the early nineteen-seventies, working largely in Germany. (In recent years, he has returned to live drama, this time in the field of opera, staging "Don Giovanni" in Paris in 2006 and accepting an invitation to direct "Così Fan Tutte" in Madrid in 2012. The mind reels.) Meanwhile, he had reëstablished contact with his father. "I engaged him for a theatre play. I was directing and he was acting. It was very funny," Haneke recalls, adding, "My father was very strong in classical parts, and he showed me two or three times how to play it, just to bring me pleasure." There is something weirdly charmed, as in late Shakespeare, about this frictionless tale of filial restoration.

In 1973, Haneke was asked by Südwestrundfunk Television to direct his first film for television, initiating a small-screen career that would last until "The Castle," of 1997. In 1979 came "Lemmings," a study of the rifts that can open up between the generations, and a bone of contention for the Hanekes. "My father was really shocked when he saw this, and he said, 'From where is coming this hate against parents?' " Haneke laughed, and went on: "I said, 'There is no hate. I am regarding the world around me and I have a precise eye for pain.' " Hence the precision of the shocks that "Lemmings" delivered to the system—less to the political system than to the systematic assurance with which we construct a comfortable life for ourselves and expect it to hold. We think it's a wall, but it's a bubble, and Haneke pricks it within minutes of the story's second part, when a policeman's wife opens the front door in the morning and an aggressive stranger jams his stick into the apartment, wedging the door open. Just another day in Hanekeland.

That sense of irruption into the placid is nothing new—as Haneke, the admirer of "Psycho," would be the first to admit. But he does not make thrillers, whatever the marketing for "Hidden" may have suggested; he makes movies that sport the trappings of the conventional thriller but proffer none of the usual satisfactions. Thus, a minivan crunches down a woodland track. Inside is a nuclear family: two adults, two kids, off to their place in the country. Inside the house, however, is an explosion ready to happen: two adults, two kids, and a shotgun. Before we have a chance to get our bearings, the movie—Haneke's "Time of the Wolf"—is one man down, and what ensues is a free fall into primitivism, not the catharsis of revenge. To anyone who saw "Fatal Attraction," for instance, where the menace from outside was acknowledged, met head on, and slain, allowing domestic peace to reign once more, this lack of payoff is not just a disappointment; it's a cheat and a con, depriving us of our basic right to melodrama. Haneke is trying to keep the customers dissatisfied.

Likewise, for lovers of "Intermezzo," in which Leslie Howard mooned and swooned over his daughter's piano teacher against a handful of European settings (he is reminded of "the days when Vienna was a happy city"), Haneke's "The Piano Teacher," based on a novel by Elfriede Jelinek, will come as a nasty surprise. Again, we get the interruption: a knock on the teacher's door at the conservatory as she listens to a singer and accompanist rehearse Schubert's "Winterreise." A prospective student, Walter, puts his head around to inquire about admissions. She sends him away, but he will destroy her life as surely as he has broken the cycle of the songs. Listen to the words of the singer: "*Wie hat der Sturm zerrissen / Des Himmels graues Kleid*"—"How the storm has torn apart the gray mantle of the sky."



That is pure Haneke: tempests of feeling are starting to brew. Decorum is preserved, though at a terrible cost. Desire will find resolution, but in the key of madness. And the face of the teacher, Professor Kohut (Isabelle Huppert), gives us everything because it gives away so little. (Later, as part of a judging panel, she listens to Walter play, and the camera lingers on her expression, porcelain-calm yet, far beneath the surface, swept away. "We shot it quite quickly, one of the quickest," Huppert said of the scene. "It's the moment when she realizes that the way he plays, he performs, is the way he's going to love her: seductive. It's the moment she falls in love.") Haneke, Huppert told me, is "the *best* person to work with—so pragmatic, no sentimental bullshit. That's a key word when he works: 'Too sentimental,' he'll say. Not no emotions—no sentimentality." He had offered her the lead in "Funny Games," which she declined, saying it was "terribly harsh for the actress." She bided her time, and along came "The Piano Teacher"—"more open, more romantic," as Huppert described it. She added, "I stayed blind to the hardest part of the script, so as not to be discouraged. Finally I read it on the plane to Vienna, and I thought, Oh God."

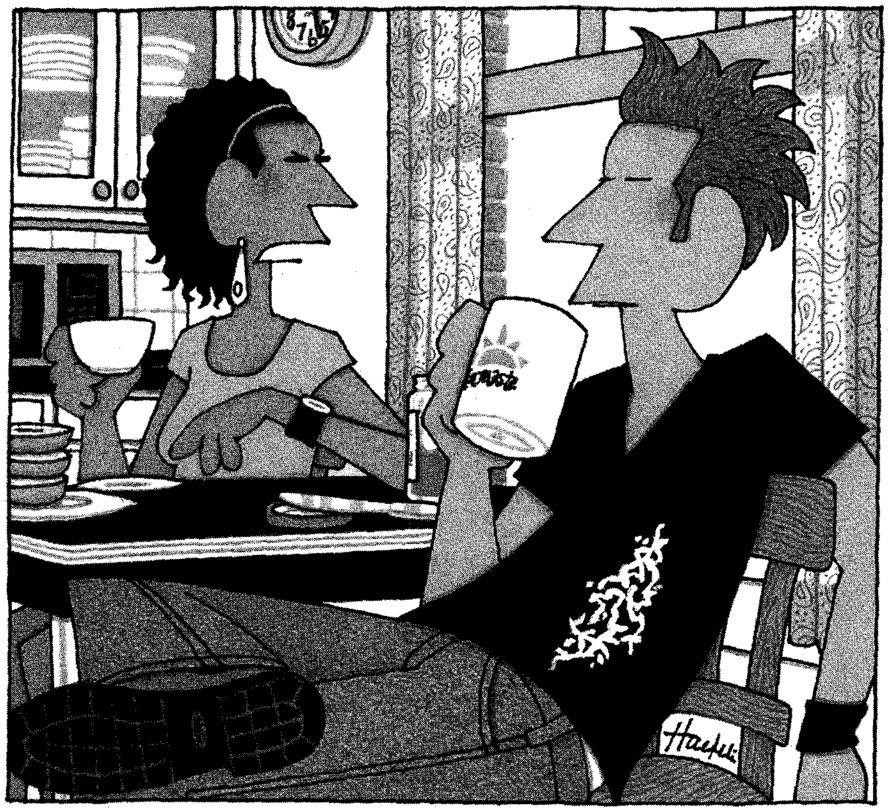
Many viewers had the same response. You find yourself dreading the next Haneke film as you would an examination (an *internal* examination, in some cases), and, looking back on it, you squirm. But you know you have not been taken for a ride, or palmed off with a moist wad of fantasy. You have been through something—ripped open like Schubert's sky.

Although the characters in "The Piano Teacher" converse in French, the film is set in Vienna. It does not come across as a happy city, and we are left to wonder, despite the claims of Leslie Howard, whether it ever was. Haneke is not the only white-bearded, much honored citizen of the place to investigate, at length, "the hostility to civilization which is produced by the pressure that civilization exercises, the renunciations of instinct which it demands." That is Sigmund Freud, in "The Future of an Illusion," but it also encapsulates the plight of Professor Kohut, a prim and censorious figure in a head scarf who likes to inhale the used tissues at a pornographic peepshow (and does so in rapture, with eyes half shut, like Baudelaire sniffing the perfume on his mistress's hair). The legacy of Freud, in Haneke's work, comprises not just the levelheaded logic of his pessimism—we *must* be unhappy if we are to survive as a functioning society—but also the conception of childhood as a hothouse, wherein our beliefs bloom most vividly and our stuntings begin. Freud wrote a short paper titled "Two Lies Told by Children," which concluded:

> It would be a serious mistake to read into childish misdemeanours like these a prognosis of the development of a bad character. Nevertheless, they are intimately connected with the most powerful motive forces in children's minds, and give notice of dispositions that will lead to later eventualities in their lives or to future neuroses.

The paper, first published with contributions from other authors under the heading of "Infantile Mental Life," dates from the summer of 1913: the time, in other words, at which "The White Ribbon" begins. You want later eventualities? Try watching the two blond boys, the offspring of the oxlike steward on the baron's estate, who sit with his pampered, non-swimming son beside a pond and push him in. Then do the math: come 1933, when Hitler becomes Chancellor, these boys will be little more than thirty, and we know—we cannot prove as much, and Haneke is too subtle to elbow us, but we *know*—the cause that they will join. By the end of "The White Ribbon," there is almost no sin that we cannot, however hesitantly, lay at the door of the village juniors, and thus, by implication, at the door of their elders' conduct. This out-of-the-way spot, with its fields of cabbages, is one of the thousand crucibles where history is being forged.

The director himself is at pains not to label his movie with too specific a tag. He told me, "It's important for me that, even in America, I will not be happy if the film is seen as a film about a German problem, about the Nazi time. That is an example, but it means more than this. It's a film about the roots of evil. It's about a group of kids who are preached certain ideals," he said, "and become the judges of others—of those who have pushed this ideology onto them. If you build an idea into an absolute, it becomes an ideology. And it helps those who have absolutely no possibility of defending themselves to follow this ideology in order to escape their misery. And that's not a question of the fascism of the right. It also counts for left-wing fascism and for religious fascism. You could make the same film—in a completely different form, of course—about the Islamists of today. There is always someone in a wretched situation who seizes the opportunity, through ideology, to avenge himself, to emerge from his misery and to rectify his life. In the name of a beautiful idea you can become a murderer."

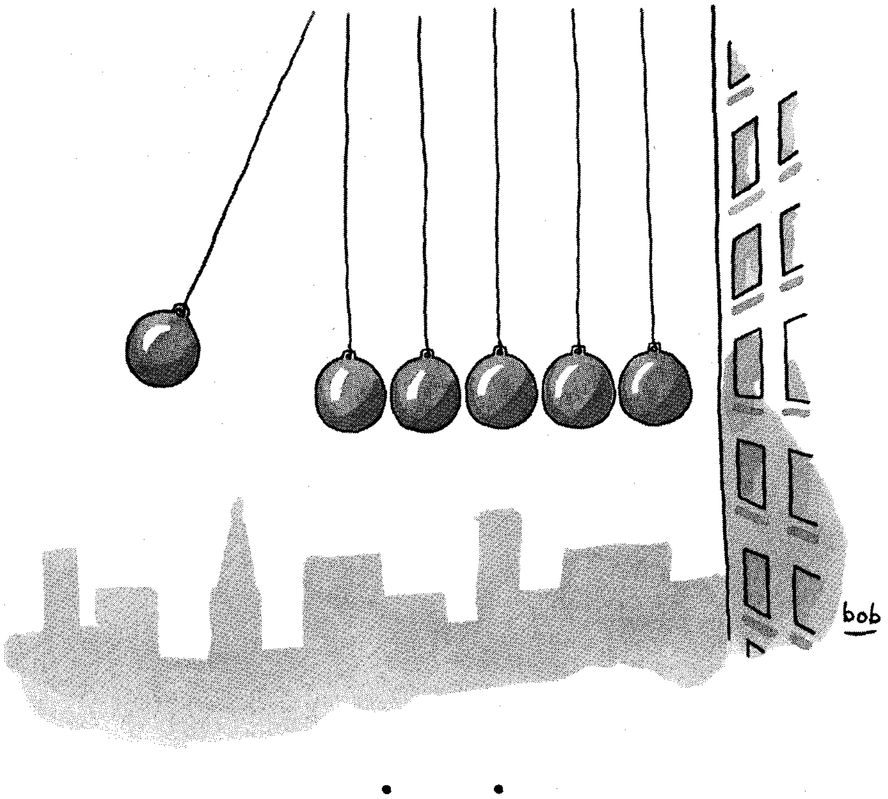


"When you say 'It's all good' what you really mean is 'I don't care.'"

Could *he* have become a murderer? It's hard to picture this gentle spirit taking up arms against the weak. Haneke was perfectly clear on this point, more so than most of us would dare to be. "There is no crime I couldn't have committed," he said. "It's so easy to say, 'Oh no, I would never do that,' but that's dishonest. We are capable of everything." He added, "It's so easy to be 'human' when you come from a privileged background." None of us can say how, under less favorable circumstances, we might have turned out. In Haneke's case, he said, "The only reason that I couldn't have been a Nazi is that I can't stand crowds. I dread crowds—crowds aren't people." As for soccer matches, "I went once when I was eleven or twelve, and it was my first and last time in a stadium. I was so frightened, so terrorized by the howling crowds, that I ran out and I never went back."

It is impossible to know what lies behind that fright, but it is tempting to ask: how does a sensitive child, born in 1942, begin to deal with what a German-speaking crowd had bayed for, and portended, in the recent past? It is common knowledge, and a source of some pride, that Germany made a concerted attempt, in the aftermath of the war, at the moral reëducation of its people, both to shame them into a sense of responsibility and to forestall any return of collective extremism. Yet the East German writer Stephan Hermlin recalled that when documentary films on the concentration camps were shown to postwar cinemagoers in Frankfurt, "in the half-light of the projector, I could see that most people turned their faces away after the beginning of the film and stayed that way until the film was over."

If much of the German nation, as Hermlin argues, "was not interested in being shaken by events, in any 'know thyself,' " the Austrian experience was, if anything, more occluding still. Haneke told me that when he was at school in Wiener Neustadt "the teaching of history ended with the First World War. There



was not one word about the time afterwards." Did he talk of that time with his stepfather? "He didn't speak with me about this. Maybe he spoke with my mother about this time, but never with me." In that respect, they were a family of typical Austrians: "I always say we are the world champions at sweeping things under the carpet."

And there, you might say, Haneke's job begins. He is, as Isabelle Huppert said to me, "very stubborn in his desires." He wants the carpet to ride up; he wants us to be shaken; he wants us not to turn away from the screen but to gaze upon what it displays; he wants us not to forget. Such a wish, as he insists, does not mean that "The White Ribbon," or any of his other works, should be construed as a parable of Nazism. Nonetheless, it seems fair to say that without so drastic a template of savagery and amnesia his films would not be as ruthless as they are. When it comes to improvements in human understanding, as opposed to technological leaps, "we're still in the Stone Age," he said. "We're still pigs in the way we bear ourselves."

No wonder his films are so unpiggish and plain, with no lurching motions of the camera. At the Vienna Film Academy, where Haneke teaches directing for part of the year, he customarily runs a quartet of screenings—"Battleship Potemkin," Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will," Costa-Gavras's "Z," and "Air Force One," with Harrison Ford—to show the students how films of different persuasions can impose themselves equally, through a bullying use of sound and editing, on the viewer's consciousness. "I like the politics of 'Z' more, but the manner is all the same," Haneke said. In his own manner, he tries to avoid any trace of the overbearing, and that includes a score. Plenty of music is played *within* a Haneke drama, most obviously in "The Piano Teacher," but none is overlaid so as to whip the action forward. "If the story is good, if the construction is good, you don't need it," Haneke said to me. "I am a big fan of David Lynch, but the only thing I don't like in his films is the score. Why? The film is so strong. The music is not fair, it's not honest—it's *easy*." Meanwhile, all is arranged on storyboards before the shooting. "One tries to re-create the complexity of life, but in a completely orderly way. I don't believe in chance during shooting. Chance is a gift of the moment, if that exists, but it's an exception. You have to prepare a chance for an actor, for instance, and push him into a certain situation. But I don't at all believe in the improvisational method."

That is one reason for the aversion to Haneke's work. It feels hard—not just tricky to elucidate but as clean and resistant as a kitchen counter, or a marble slab. He reminds me of Flaubert, another classicist in a sentimental age, who wrote to a friend on Christmas Day, 1876, "Be well-ordered in your life, and as ordinary as a bourgeois, in order to be violent and original in your work." That is not what we have come to expect of Hollywood, say, which feeds on legends of excess—one way for the industry to flatter itself with the illusion that, rather than merely grinding out a product, it is gallantly allowing private demons to be summoned and exorcised. Haneke is less bent on self-expression. "My work is not personal in the sense that it comes from my own wounds," he said, and then searched around, in various languages, for the right word: "*Kränkung* . . . *la vie est une grande, une permanente* . . . hurting. I have always felt that. It's not a private disappointment. There are wounds in every kind of life. I have no reason to complain—I'm highly spoiled by success—but, if you ask me if I'm happy, that's another matter. If you look at the suffering around you, you can't be happy."

He seemed contented enough, as we worked our way through the wurst, in the hunters' retreat. He even vouchsafed that his next film would be about old age, with all its vexations. "This is the problem for everyone, all the time: how to live with another person, right to the end," he said. I asked what had happened to his family in later life, and he answered, "My aunt killed herself at the age of ninety-three." This was the aunt who had raised him, idyllically, outside Vienna. I offered condolences, but none were required. "I found her in time, and saved her. And the first time I saw her, when she woke up in the ward, she said to me, 'Why did you do that?' So she waited until I went abroad for a festival or something, and then she tried again, successfully."

"How did you feel when you heard about it?" I asked him.

Haneke smiled—either in relief that her sufferings were over at last or in rueful envy, because ours never cease.

"I was very happy," he said. ♦

FICTION

VICTORY LAP

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

Three days shy of her fifteenth birthday, Alison Pope paused at the top of the stairs.

Say the staircase was marble. Say she descended and all heads turned. Where was {special one}? Approaching now, bowing slightly, he exclaimed, How can so much grace be contained in one small package? Oops. Had he said *small package*? And just stood there? Broad princelike face totally bland of expression? Poor thing! Sorry, no way, down he went, he was definitely not {special one}.

What about this guy, behind Mr. Small Package, standing near the home entertainment center? With a thick neck of farmer integrity yet tender ample lips, who, placing one hand on the small of her back, whispered, Dreadfully sorry you had to endure that bit about the small package just now. Let us go stand on the moon. Or, uh, in the moon. In the moonlight.

Had he said, *Let us go stand on the moon*? If so, she would have to be like, {eyebrows up}. And if no wry acknowledgment was forthcoming, be like, Uh, I am not exactly dressed for standing on the moon, which, as I understand it, is super-cold?

Come on, guys, she couldn't keep treading gracefully on this marble staircase in her mind forever! That dear old white-hair in the tiara was getting all like, Why are those supposed princes making that darling girl march in place ad nausea? Plus she had a recital tonight and had to go fetch her tights from the dryer.

Egads! One found oneself still standing at the top of the stairs.

Do the thing where, facing upstairs, hand on railing, you hop down the stairs one at a time, which was getting a lot harder lately, due to, someone's feet were getting longer every day, seemed like.

Pas de chat, pas de chat.

Changement, changement.

Hop over thin metal thingie separating hallway tile from living-room rug.

Curtsy to self in entryway mirror.

Come on, Mom, get here. We do not wish to be castrigated by Ms. Callow again in the wings.

Although actually she loved Ms. C. So strict! Also loved the other girls in class. And the girls from school. *Loved* them. Everyone was so nice. Plus the boys at her school. Plus the teachers at her school. All of them were doing their best. Actually, she loved her whole town. That adorable grocer, spraying his lettuce! Pastor Carol, with her large comfortable butt! The chubby postman, gesticulating with his padded envelopes! It had once been a mill town. Wasn't that crazy? What did that even mean?

Also she loved her house. Across the creek was the Russian church. So ethnic! That onion dome had loomed in her window since her Pooh footie days. Also loved Gladsong Drive. Every house on Gladsong was a Corona del Mar. That was amazing! If you had a friend on Gladsong, you already knew where everything was in his or her home.

Jeté, jeté, rond de jambe.

Pas de bourrée.

On a happy whim, do front roll, hop to your feet, kiss the picture of Mom and Dad taken at Penney's back in the Stone Ages, when you were that little cutie right there {kiss} with a hair bow bigger than all outdoors.

Sometimes, feeling happy like this, she imagined a baby deer trembling in the woods.

Where's your mama, little guy?

I don't know, the deer said in the voice of Heather's little sister Becca.

Are you afraid? she asked it. Are you hungry? Do you want me to hold you?

O.K., the baby deer said.

Here came the hunter now, dragging the deer's mother by the antlers. Her guts were completely splayed. Jeez, that was nice! She covered the baby's eyes and was like, Don't you have anything better to do, dank hunter, than kill this baby's mom? You seem like a nice enough guy.

Is my mom killed? the baby said in Becca's voice.

No, no, she said. This gentleman was just leaving.

The hunter, captivated by her beauty, toffed or doffed his cap, and, going down on one knee, said, If I could will life back into this fawn, I would do so, in hopes you might defer one tender kiss upon our elderly forehead.

Go, she said. Only, for your task of penance do not eat her. Lay her out in a field of clover, with roses strewn about her. And bestow a choir, to softly sing of her foul end.

Lay who out? the baby deer said.

No one, she said. Never mind. Stop asking so many questions.

Pas de chat, pas de chat.

Changement, changement.

She felt hopeful that {special one} would hail from far away. The local boys possessed a certain *je ne sais quoi*, which, tell the truth, she was not *très* crazy about, such as: actually named their own nuts. She had overheard that! And aspired to work for County Power because the work shirts were awesome and you got them free.

So ixnay on the local boys. A special ixnay on Matt Drey, owner of the largest mouth in the land. Kissing him last night at the pep rally had been like kissing an underpass. Scary! Kissing Matt was like suddenly this cow in a sweater is bearing down on you, who will not take no for an answer, and his huge cow head is being flooded by chemicals that are drowning out what little powers of reason Matt actually did have.

What she liked was being in charge of her. Her body, her mind. Her thoughts, her career, her future.

That was what she liked.

So be it.

We might have a slight snack.

Un petit repas.

Was she special? Did she consider herself special? Oh, gosh, she didn't know. In the history of the world many had been more special than her. Helen Keller had been awesome; Mother Teresa was amazing; Mrs. Roosevelt was quite chipper in spite of her husband, who was handicapped, which, in addition, she had been gay, with those big old teeth, long before such time as being gay and First Lady was even conceptual. She, Alison, could not hope to compete in the category of those ladies. Not yet, anyway!

There was so much she didn't know! Like how to change the oil. Or even check the oil. How to open the hood. How to bake brownies. That was embarrassing, actually, being a girl and all. And what was a mortgage? Did it come with the house? When you breast-fed, did you have to like push the milk out?

Egads. Who was this wan figure, visible through the living-room window, trotting up Gladsong Drive? Kyle

QUICKHONEY

Boot, palest kid in all the land? Still dressed in his weird cross-country-running toggles?

Poor thing. He looked like a skeleton with a mullet. Were those cross-country shorts from the like "Charlie's Angels" days or *quoi*? How could he run so well when he seemed to have literally no muscles? Every day he ran home like this, shirtless with his backpack on, then hit the remote from down by the Fungs' and scooted into his garage without breaking stride.

You almost had to admire the poor goof.

They'd grown up together, been little beaners in that mutual sandbox down by the creek. Hadn't they bathed together when wee or some such crud? She hoped that never got out. Because in terms of friends Kyle was basically down to Tasso Slavko, who walked leaning way backward and was always retrieving things from between his teeth, announcing the name of the retrieved thing in Greek, then re-eating it. Kyle's mom and dad didn't let him do squat. He had to call home if the movie in World Culture might show bare boobs. Each of the items in his lunch box was clearly labelled.

Pas de bourrée.

And curtsy.

Pour quantity of Cheez Doodles into compartmentalized old-school Tupperware dealie.

Thanks, Mom, thanks, Dad. Your kitchen *rocks*.

Shake Tupperware dealie back and forth like panning for gold, then offer to some imaginary poor gathered round.

Please enjoy. Is there anything else I can do for you folks?

You have already done enough, Alison, by even deigning to speak to us.

That is so not true! Don't you understand, all people deserve respect? Each of us is a rainbow.

Uh, really? Look at this big open sore on my poor shrivelled flank.

Allow me to fetch you some Vaseline.

That would be much appreciated. This thing kills.

But as far as that rainbow idea? She believed that. People were amazing. Mom was awesome, Dad was awesome, her teachers worked so hard and had kids of their own, and some were even getting divorced, such as Mrs. Dees, but still always took time for their students. What she found especially inspiring about Mrs. Dees was that, even though Mr. Dees was cheating on Mrs. Dees with the lady who ran the bowling alley, Mrs. Dees was still teaching the best course ever in Ethics, posing such questions as: Can goodness win? Or do good people always get shafted, evil being more reckless? That last bit seemed to be Mrs. Dees taking a shot at the bowling-alley gal. But seriously! Is life fun or scary? Are people good or bad? On the one hand, that clip of those gauntish pale bodies being steamrolled while fat German ladies looked on chomping gum. On the other hand, sometimes rural folks, even if their particular farms were on hills, stayed up late filling sandbags.

In their straw poll she had voted for people being good and life being fun, with Mrs. Dees giving her a pitying glance as she stated her views: To do good, you just have to decide to do good. You have to be brave. You have to stand up for what's right. At that last, Mrs. Dees had made this kind of groan. Which was fine. Mrs. Dees had a lot of pain in her life, yet, interestingly? Still obviously found something fun about life and good about people, because otherwise why sometimes stay up so late grading you come in the next day all exhausted, blouse on backward, having messed it up in the early-morning dark, you dear discombobulated thing?

Here came a knock on the door. Back door. In-ter-est-ing. Who could it be? Father Dmitri from across the way? UPS? FedEx? With *un petit* check *pour Papa*?

Jeté, jeté, rond de jambe.

Pas de bourrée.

Open door, and—

Here was a man she did not know. Quite huge fellow, in one of those meter-reader vests.

Something told her to step back in, slam the door. But that seemed rude.

Instead she froze, smiled, did {eyebrow-raise} to indicate: May I help you?

Kyle Boot dashed through the garage, into the living area, where the big clocklike wooden indicator was set at All Out. Other choices included: Mom & Dad Out; Mom Out; Dad Out; Kyle Out; Mom & Kyle Out; Dad & Kyle Out; and All In.

Why did they even need All In? Wouldn't they know it when they were All In? Would he like to ask Dad that? Who, in his excellent, totally silent downstairs woodshop, had designed and built the Family Status Indicator?

Ha.

Ha ha.

On the kitchen island was a Work Notice.

> Scout: New geode on deck. Place in yard per included drawing. No goofing. Rake area first, put down plastic as I have shown you. Then lay in white rock. THIS GEODE EXPENSIVE. Pls take seriously. No reason this should not be done by time I get home. This = five (5) Work Points.

Gar, Dad, do you honestly feel it fair that I should have to slave in the yard until dark, after a rigorous cross-country practice that included sixteen 440s, eight 880s, a mile-for-time, a kajillion Drake sprints, and a five-mile Indian relay?

Shoes off, mister.

Yoinks, too late. He was already at the TV. And had left an incriminating trail of micro-clods. Way verboten. Could the micro-clods be hand-plucked? Although, problem: if he went back to hand-pluck the micro-clods, he'd leave an incriminating new trail of micro-clods.

He took off his shoes and stood mentally rehearsing a little show he liked to call "WHAT IF . . . RIGHT NOW?"

WHAT IF they came home RIGHT NOW?

It's a funny story, Dad! I came in thoughtlessly! Then realized what I'd done! I guess, when I think about it, what I'm happy about? Is how quickly I self-corrected! The reason I came in so thoughtlessly was, I wanted to get right to work, Dad, per your note!

He raced in his socks to the garage, threw his shoes into the garage, ran for the vacuum, vacuumed up the micro-clods, then realized, holy golly, he had thrown his shoes into the garage rather than placing them on the Shoe Sheet as required, toes facing away from the door for ease of donnage later.

He stepped into the garage, placed his shoes on the Shoe Sheet, stepped back inside.

Scout, Dad said in his head, has anyone ever told you that even the most neatly maintained garage is going to have some oil on its floor, which is now on your socks, being tracked all over the tan Berber?

Oh gar, his ass was grass.

But no—*celebrate good times, come on*—no oil stain on rug.

He tore off his socks. It was absolutely verboten for him to be in the main living area barefoot. Mom and Dad coming home to find him Tarzaning around like some sort of white-trasher would not be the least fucking bit—

Swearing in your head? Dad said in his head. Step up, Scout, be a man. If you want to swear, swear aloud.

I don't want to swear aloud.

Then don't swear in your head.

Mom and Dad would be heartsick if they could hear the swearing he sometimes did in his head, such as crap-cunt shit-turd dick-in-the-ear butt-creamery. Why couldn't he stop doing that? They thought so highly of him, sending weekly braggy e-mails to both sets of grandparents, such as: Kyle's been super-busy keeping up his grades while running varsity cross-country though still a sophomore, while setting aside a little time each day to manufacture such humdingers as cunt-swoggle rear-fuck—

What was wrong with him? Why couldn't he be grateful for all that Mom and Dad did for him, instead of—

Cornhole the ear-cunt.

Flake-fuck the pale vestige with a proddering dick-knee.

You could always clear the mind with a hard pinch on your own minimal love handle.

Ouch.

Hey, today was Tuesday, a Major Treat day. The five (5) new Work Points for placing the geode, plus his existing two (2) Work Points, totalled seven (7) Work Points, which, added to his eight (8) accrued Usual Chore Points, made fifteen (15) Total Treat Points, which could garner him a Major Treat (for example, two handfuls of yogurt-covered raisins), plus twenty free-choice TV minutes, although the particular show would have to be negotiated with Dad at time of cash-in.

One thing you will not be watching, Scout, is "America's Most Outspoken Dirt Bikers."

Whatever.

Whatever, Dad.

Really, Scout? "Whatever"? Will it be "whatever" when I take away all your Treat Points and force you to quit cross-country, as I have several times threatened to do if a little more cheerful obedience wasn't forthcoming?

No, no, no. I don't want to quit, Dad. Please. I'm good at it. You'll see, first meet. Even Matt Drey said—

Who is Matt Drey? Some ape on the football team?

Yes.

Is his word law?

No.

What did he say?

Little shit can run.

Nice talk, Scout. Ape talk. Anyway, you may not make it to the first meet. Your ego seems to be overflowing its banks. And why? Because you can jog? Anyone can jog. Beasts of the field can jog.

I'm not quitting! Anal-cock shitbird rectum-fritz! Please, I'm begging you, it's the only thing I'm decent at! Mom, if he makes me quit I swear to God I'll—

Drama doesn't suit you, Beloved Only.

If you want the privilege of competing in a team sport, Scout, show us that you can live within our perfectly reasonable system of directives designed to benefit you.

Hello.

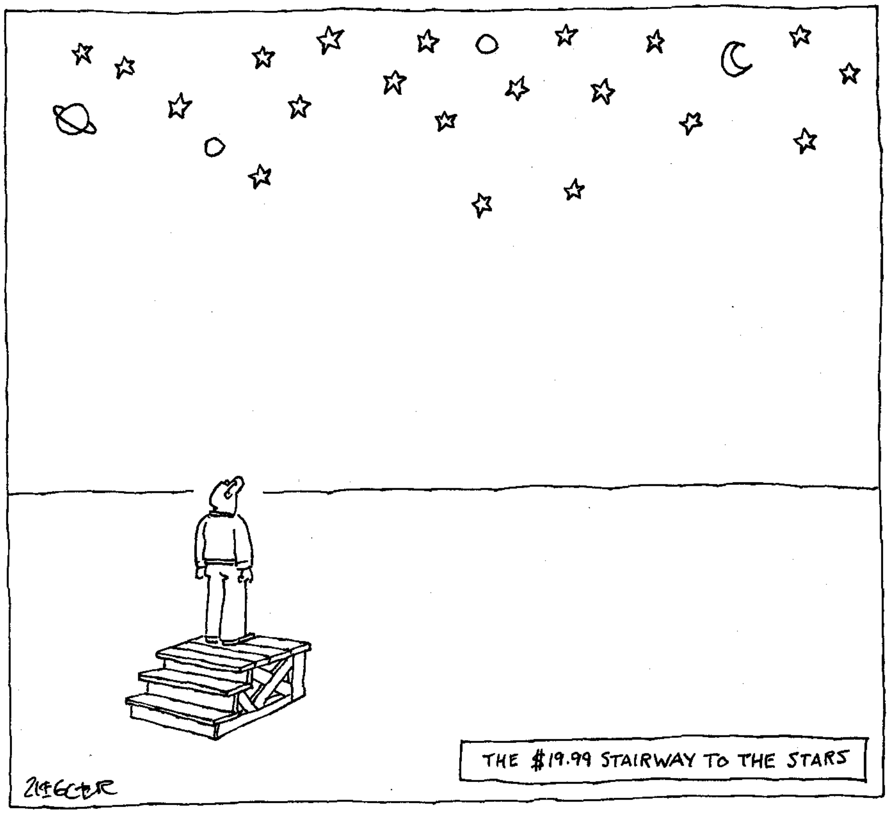
A van had just pulled up in the St. Mikhail's parking lot.

Kyle walked in a controlled, gentlemanly manner to the kitchen counter. On the counter was Kyle's Traffic Log, which served the dual purpose of (1) buttressing Dad's argument that Father Dmitri should build a soundproof retaining wall and (2) constituting a data set for a possible Science Fair project for him, Kyle, entitled, by Dad, "Correlation of Church Parking Lot Volume vs. Day of Week, with Ancillary Investigation of Sunday Volume Throughout Year."

Smiling agreeably as if he enjoyed filling out the Log, Kyle very legibly filled out the Log:

> Vehicle: VAN.
> Color: GRAY.
> Make: CHEVY.
> Year: UNKNOWN.

A guy got out of the van. One of the usual Rooskies. "Rooskie" was an al-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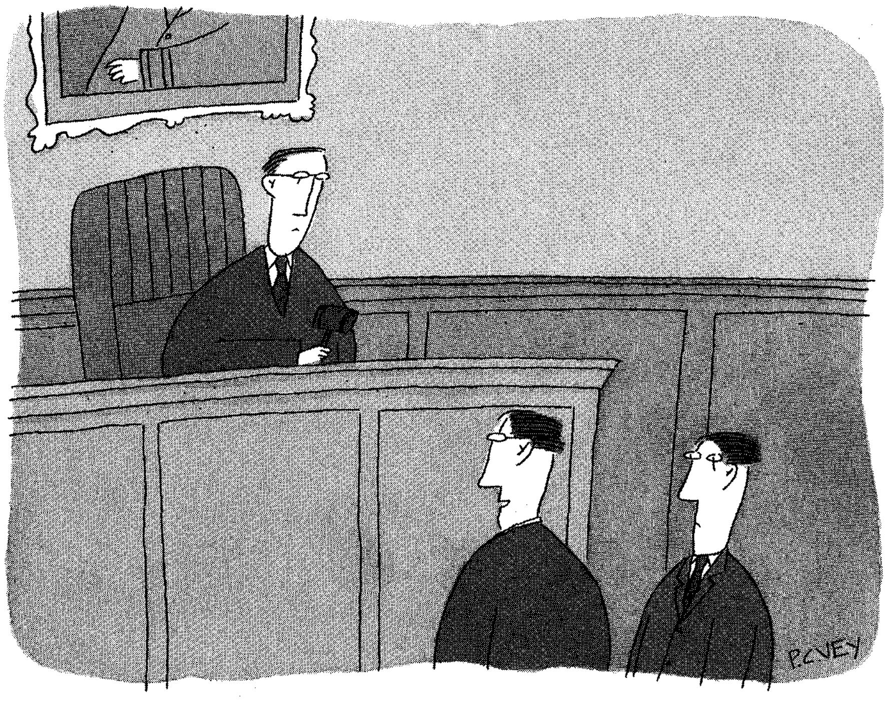

"The way I see it, justice delayed is that many more billable hours."

lowed slang. Also "dang it." Also "holy golly." Also "crapper." The Rooskie was wearing a jean jacket over a hoodie, which, in Kyle's experience, was not unusual church-wear for the Rooskies, who sometimes came directly over from Jiffy Lube still wearing coveralls.

Under "Vehicle Driver" he wrote, PROBABLE PARISHIONER.

That sucked. Stank, rather. The guy being a stranger, he, Kyle, now had to stay inside until the stranger left the neighborhood. Which totally futzed up his geode placing. He'd be out there until midnight. What a detriment!

The guy put on a DayGlo vest. Ah, dude was a meter reader.

The meter reader looked left, then right, leaped across the creek, entered the Pope back yard, passed between the soccer-ball rebounder and the in-ground pool, then knocked on the Pope door.

Good leap there, Boris.

The door swung open.

Alison.

Kyle's heart was singing. He'd always thought that was just a phrase. Alison was like a national treasure. In the dictionary under "beauty" there should be a picture of her in that jean skort. Although lately she didn't seem to like him all that much.

Now she stepped across her deck so the meter reader could show her something. Something electrical wrong on the roof? The guy seemed eager to show her. Actually, he had her by the wrist. And was like tugging.

That was weird. Wasn't it? Nothing had ever been weird around here before. So probably it was fine. Probably the guy was just a really new meter reader?

Somehow Kyle felt like stepping out onto the deck. He stepped out. The guy froze. Alison's eyes were scared-horse eyes. The guy cleared his throat, turned slightly to let Kyle see something.

A knife.

The meter reader had a knife.

Here's what you're doing, the guy said. Standing right there until we leave. Move a muscle, I knife her in the heart. Swear to God. Got it?

Kyle's mouth was so spitless all he could do was make his mouth do the shape it normally did when saying Yes.

Now they were crossing the yard. Alison threw herself to the ground. The guy hauled her up. She threw herself down. He hauled her up. It was odd seeing Alison tossed like a rag doll in the sanctuary of the perfect yard her dad had made for her. She threw herself down.

The guy hissed something and she rose, suddenly docile.

In his chest Kyle felt the many directives, Major and Minor, he was right now violating. He was on the deck shoeless, on the deck shirtless, was outside when a stranger was near, had engaged with that stranger.

Last week Sean Ball had brought a wig to school to more effectively mimic the way Bev Mirren chewed her hair when nervous. Kyle had briefly considered intervening. At Evening Meeting, Mom had said that she considered Kyle's decision not to intervene judicious. Dad had said, That was none of your business. You could have been badly hurt. Mom had said, Think of all the resources we've invested in you, Beloved Only. Dad had said, I know we sometimes strike you as strict but you are literally all we have.

They were at the soccer-ball rebounder now, Alison's arm up behind her back. She was making a low repetitive sound of denial, like she was trying to invent a noise that would adequately communicate her feelings about what she'd just this instant realized was going to happen to her.

He was a kid. There was nothing he could do. In his chest he felt the lush release of pressure that always resulted when he submitted to a directive. There at his feet was the geode. He should just look at that until they were gone. It was a great one. Maybe the greatest one ever. The crystals at the cutaway glistened in the sun. It would look nice in the yard. Once he'd placed it. He'd place it once they were gone. Dad would be impressed that even after what had occurred he'd remembered to place the geode.

That's the ticket, Scout.

We are well pleased, Beloved Only.

Super job, Scout.

Holy crap. It was happening. She was marching along all meek like the trooper he'd known she'd be. He'd had her in mind since the baptism of what's-his-name. Sergei's kid. At the Russian church. She'd been standing in her yard, her dad or some such taking her picture.

He'd been like, Hello, Betty.

Kenny had been like, Little young, bro.

He'd been like, For you, grandpa.

When you studied history, the history of cultures, you saw your own individual time as hidebound. There were various theories of acquiescence. In Bible days a king might ride through a field and go: That one. And she would be brought unto him. And they would duly be betrothed and if she gave birth unto a son, super, bring out the streamers, she was a keeper. Was she, that first night, digging it? Probably not. Was she shaking like a leaf? Didn't matter. What mattered was offspring and the furtherance of the lineage. Plus the exaltation of the king, which resulted in righteous kingly power.

Here was the creek.

He marched her right through.

The following bullet points remained in the decision matrix: take to side van door, shove in, follow in, tape wrists/mouth, hook to chain, make speech. He had the speech down cold. Had practiced it both in his head and on the recorder: *Calm your heart, darling, I know you're scared because you don't know me yet and didn't expect this today but give me a chance and you will see we will fly high. See I am putting the knife right over here and I don't expect I'll have to use it, right?*

If she wouldn't get in the van, punch hard in gut. Then pick up, carry to side van door, throw in, tape wrists/mouth, hook to chain, make speech, etc., etc.

Stop, pause, he said.

Gal stopped.

Fucksake. Side door of the van was locked. How undisciplined was that. Insuring that the van door was unlocked was clearly indicated on the pre-mission matrix. Melvin appeared in his mind. On Melvin's face was the look of hot disappointment that had always preceded an ass-whooping, which had always preceded the other thing. Put up your hands, Melvin said, defend yourself.

True, true. Little error there. Should have double-checked the pre-mission matrix.

No biggie.

Joy not fear.

Melvin was dead fifteen years. Mom dead twelve.

Little bitch was turned around now, looking back at the house. That willfulness wouldn't stand. That was going to get nipped in the bud. He'd have to remember to hurt her early, establish a baseline.

Turn the fuck around, he said.

She turned around.

He unlocked the door, swung it open. Moment of truth. If she got in and let him use the tape, they were home free. He'd picked out a place in Sackett, big-ass cornfield, dirt road leading in. If fuckwise it went good they'd pick up the freeway from there. Basically steal the van. It was Kenny's van. He'd borrowed it for the day. Screw Kenny. Kenny had once called him stupid. Too bad, Kenny, that remark just cost you one van. If fuckwise it went bad and she didn't properly arouse him he'd abort the activity, truncate the subject, heave the thing out, clean van as necessary, go buy corn, return van to Kenny, say, Hey, bro, here's a shitload of corn, thanks for the van, I never could've bought a suitable quantity of corn in my car. Then lay low, watch the papers like he'd done with the non-arousing redhead out in—

Gal gave him an imploring look, like, Please don't.

Was this a good time? To give her one in the gut, knock the wind out of her sails?

It was.

He did.

The geode was beautiful. What a beautiful geode. What made it beautiful? What were the principal characteristics of a beautiful geode? Come on, think. Come on, concentrate.

She'll recover in time, Beloved Only.

None of our affair, Scout.

We're amazed by your good judgment, Beloved Only.

Dimly he noted that Alison had been punched. Eyes on the geode, he heard the little *oof*.

His heart dropped at the thought of what he was letting happen. They'd used goldfish snacks as coins. They'd made bridges out of rocks. Down by the creek. Back in the day. Oh God. He should've never stepped outside. Once they were gone he'd just go back inside, pretend he'd never stepped out, make the model-railroad town, still be making it when Mom and Dad got home. When eventually someone told him about it? He'd make a certain face. Already on his face he could feel the face he would make, like, What? Alison? Raped? Killed? Oh God. Raped and

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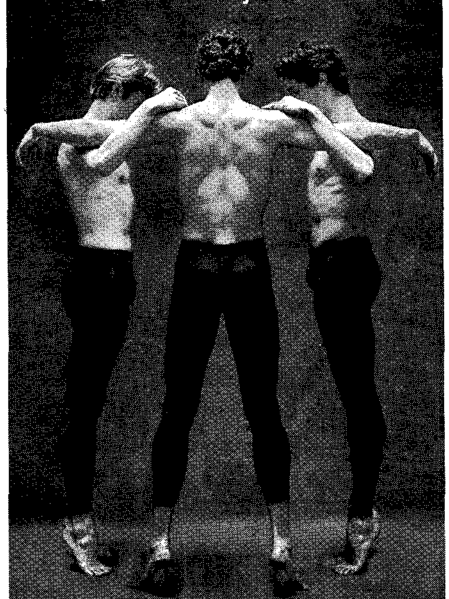

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killed while I innocently made my railroad town, sitting cross-legged and unaware on the floor like a tiny little—

No. No, no, no. They'd be gone soon. Then he could go inside. Call 911. Although then everyone would know he'd done nothing. All his future life would be bad. Forever he'd be the guy who'd done nothing. Besides, calling wouldn't do any good. They'd be long gone. The Parkway was just across Featherstone, with like a million arteries and cloverleafs or whatever sprouting out of it. So that was that. In he'd go. As soon as they left. Leave, leave, leave, he thought, so I can go inside, forget this ever—

Then he was running. Across the lawn. Oh God! What was he doing, what was he doing? Jesus, shit, the directives he was violating! Running in the yard (bad for the sod); transporting a geode without its protective wrapping; hopping the fence, which stressed the fence, which had cost a pretty penny; leaving the yard; leaving the yard barefoot; entering the Secondary Area without permission; entering the creek barefoot (broken glass, dangerous microorganisms), and, not only that, oh God, suddenly he saw what this giddy part of himself intended, which was to violate a directive so Major and absolute that it wasn't even a directive, since you didn't need a directive to know how totally verboten it was to—

He burst out of the creek, the guy still not turning, and let the geode fly into his head, which seemed to emit a weird edge-seep of blood even before the skull visibly indented and the guy sat right on his ass.

Yes! Score! It was fun! Fun dominating a grownup! Fun using the most dazzling gazelle-like leg speed ever seen in the history of mankind to dash soundlessly across space and master this huge galoot, who otherwise, right now, would be—

What if he hadn't?

God, what if he hadn't?

He imagined the guy bending Alison in two like a pale garment bag while pulling her hair and thrusting bluntly, as he, Kyle, sat cowed and obedient, tiny railroad viaduct grasped in his pathetic babyish—

Jesus! He skipped over and hurled the geode through the windshield of the van, which imploded, producing an inward rain of glass shards that made the sound of thousands of tiny bamboo wind chimes.

He scrambled up the hood of the van, retrieved the geode.

Really? Really? You were going to ruin her life, ruin my life, you cunt-probe dick-munch ass-gashing Animal? Who's bossing who now? Gash-ass, jiz-lips, turd-munch—

He'd never felt so strong/angry/wild. Who's the man? Who's your daddy? What else must he do? To insure that Animal did no further harm? You still moving, freak? Got a plan, stroke-dick? Want a skull gash on top of your existing skull gash, big man? You think I won't? You think I—

Easy, Scout, you're out of control.

Slow your motor down, Beloved Only.

Quiet. I'm the boss of me.

FUCK!

What the hell? What was he doing on the ground? Had he tripped? Did someone wonk him? Did a branch fall? God damn. He touched his head. His hand came away bloody.

The beanpole kid was bending. To pick something up. A rock. Why was that kid off his porch? Where was the knife?

Where was the gal?

Crab-crawling toward the creek.

Flying across her yard.

Going into her house.

Fuck it, everything was fucked. Better hit the road. With what, his good looks? He had eight bucks total.

Ah Christ! The kid had smashed the windshield! With the rock! Kenny was not going to like that one bit.

He tried to stand but couldn't. The blood was just pouring out. He was not going to jail again. No way. He'd slit his wrists. Where was the knife? He'd stab himself in the chest. That had nobility. Then the people would know his name. Which of them had the balls to samurai themselves with a knife in the chest?

None.

Nobody.

Go ahead, pussy. Do it.

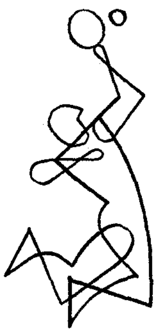
No. The king does not take his own life. The superior man silently accepts the mindless rebuke of the rabble. Waits to rise and fight anew. Plus he had no idea where the knife was. Well, he didn't need it. He'd crawl into the woods, kill something with his bare hands. Or make a trap from some grass. Ugh. Was he going to barf? There, he had. Right on his lap.

Figures you'd blow the simplest thing, Melvin said.

Melvin, God, can't you see my head is bleeding so bad?

A kid did it to you. You're a joke. You got fucked by a kid.

Oh, sirens, perfect.



Well, it was a sad day for the cops. He'd fight them hand to hand. He'd sit until the last moment, watching them draw near, doing a silent death mantra that would centralize all his life power in his fists.

He sat thinking about his fists. They were huge granite boulders. They were a pit bull each. He tried to get up. Somehow his legs weren't working. He hoped the cops would get here soon. His head really hurt. When he touched up there, things moved. It was like he was wearing a gore-cap. He was going to need a bunch of stitches. He hoped it wouldn't hurt too much. Probably it would, though.

Where was that beanpole kid?

Oh, here he was.

Looming over him, blocking out the sun, rock held high, yelling something, but he couldn't tell what, because of the ringing in his ears.

Then he saw that the kid was going to bring the rock down. He closed his eyes and waited and was not at peace at all but instead felt the beginnings of a terrible dread welling up inside him, and if that dread kept growing at the current rate, he realized in a flash of insight, there was a name for the place he would be then, and it was Hell.

Alison stood at the kitchen window. She'd peed herself. Which was fine. People did that. When superscared. She'd noticed it while making the call. Her hands had been shaking so bad. They still were. One leg was doing the Thumper thing. God, the things he'd said to her. He'd punched her. He'd pinched her. The mark on her arm was black. How could Kyle still be out there? But there he was, in those comical shorts, so confident he was goofing around, hands clenched over his head like a boxer from some cute alt universe where a kid that skinny could actually win a fight against a guy with a knife.

Wait.

His hands weren't clenched. He was holding the rock, shouting something down at the guy, who was on his knees, like the blindfolded Chinese fellow in that video they'd seen in History, about to get sword-killed by a formal dude in a helmet.

Kyle, don't, she whispered.

For months afterward she had nightmares in which Kyle brought the rock down. She was on the deck trying to scream his name but nothing was coming out. Down came the rock. Then the guy had no head. The blow just literally dissolved his head. Then his body tumped over and Kyle turned to her with this heartbroken look of, My life is over. I have killed a guy.

Why was it, she sometimes wondered, that in dreams we can't do the simplest things? Like a crying puppy is standing on some broken glass and you want to pick it up and brush the shards off its pads but you can't because you're balancing a ball on your head. Or you're driving and there's this old guy on crutches, and you go, to Mr. Feder, your Driver's Ed teacher, Should I swerve? And he's like, Uh, probably. But then you hear this big clunk and Feder makes a negative mark in his book.

Sometimes she'd wake up crying from the dream about Kyle. The last time, Mom and Dad were already there, going, That's not how it was. Remember, Allie? How did it happen? Say it. Say it out loud. Allie, can you tell Mommy and Daddy how it really happened?

I ran outside, she said. I shouted.

That's right, Dad said. You shouted. Shouted like a champ.

And what did Kyle do? Mom said.

Put down the rock, she said.

A bad thing happened to you kids, Dad said. But it could have been worse.

So much worse, Mom said.

But because of you kids, Dad said, it wasn't.

You did so good, Mom said.

Did beautiful, Dad said. ♦

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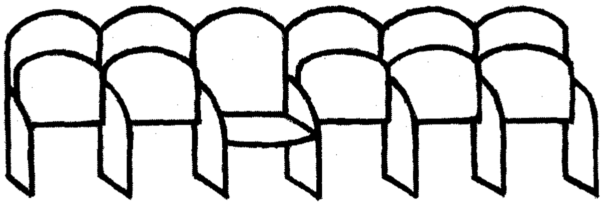


ON TELEVISION

LENO AT THE BAT

A strikeout in NBC's prime-time lineup.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

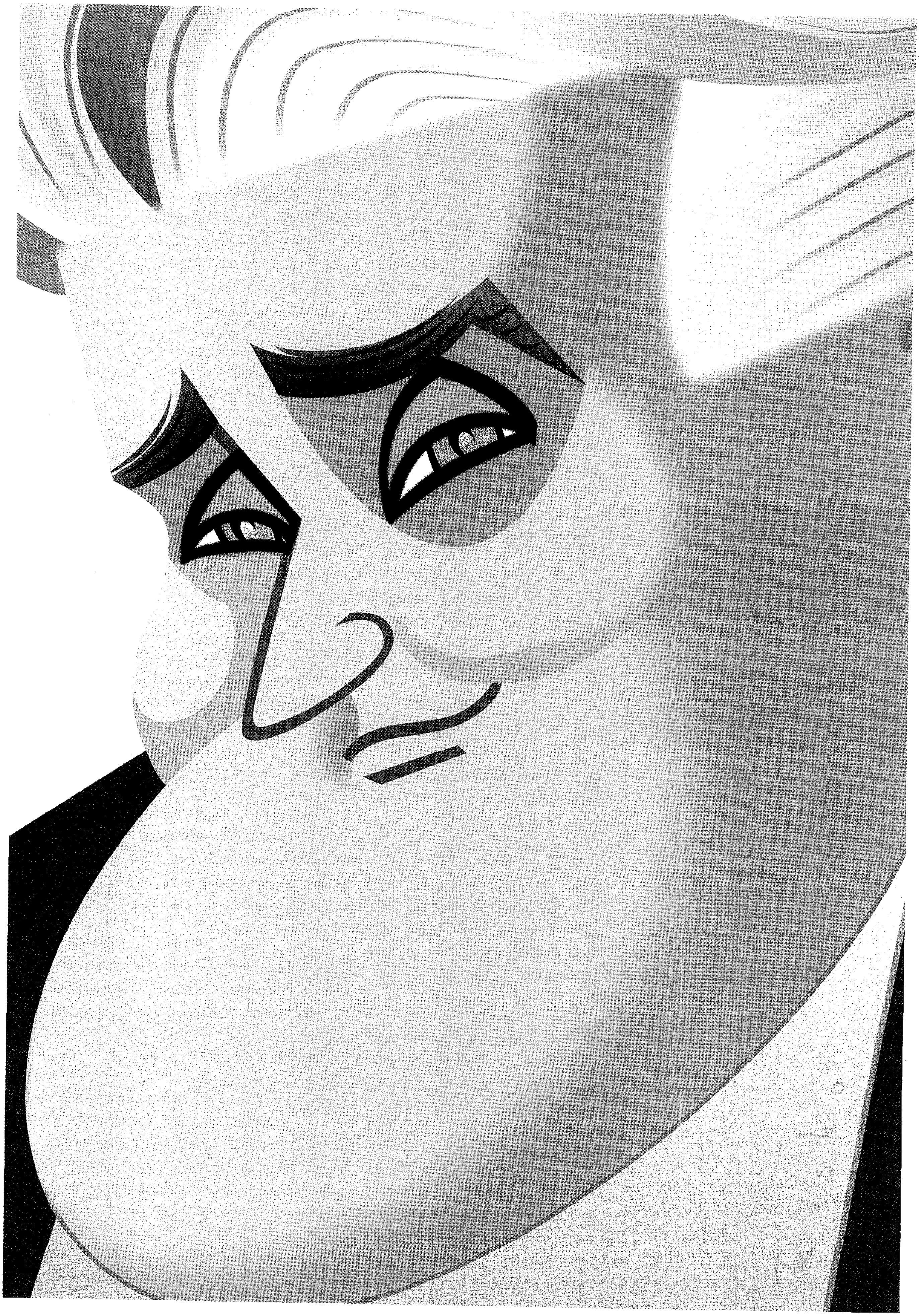
Two major show-business developments in the past half decade have inspired a combination of puzzlement, vexation, and dread, and both of them involved Jay Leno and NBC. The first was the announcement, in the fall of 2004, that in 2009 Conan O'Brien would take over Leno's job as the host of the "Tonight Show," and the second was the announcement, last winter, that this fall Leno would begin hosting a new show, at 10 P.M. five nights a week. Of course, part of the dread inspired by these announcements had to do with the knowledge that both would take up an inordinate amount of time and space in the news and in the chatosphere. The first round of self-referential on-air humor—with Leno and David Letterman both making bitter jokes about NBC, which had passed over Letterman in 1992, when Johnny Carson retired, and had now come close to pulling the rug out from under Leno—still seems like yesterday, and the second round, with Leno making needling jokes about being fired by NBC, actually *was* yesterday. Letterman is now making jokes about the 10 P.M. time slot, too, though it's hard to tell whether he feels smug about his own fate or whether he's insecure about not getting something he didn't want anyway.

With its first decision, NBC was sacrificing a known, popular, and loyal star for a more eggheaded, quirky replacement, who stood a good chance of being denatured by the move from his 12:30 A.M. time slot. With the second, it was chipping away at its legacy of strong dramatic series and possibly overloading the night with yucks—all in order to save money. What's mystifying is why Leno accepted NBC's offer to do another nightly show. He did workhorse duty for the network for seventeen years, and it dissed him twice, publicly and at length. (It also, of course, paid him more than a hundred million dollars over the years.) He's fifty-nine years old, tremendously wealthy, and still has a successful standup career—he does about a hundred and sixty gigs a year, a superhuman feat. And the move to 10 P.M. didn't seem like a good idea to anyone, not even NBC, which clearly considered the new show not a creative move but a practical solution (it hoped, sweatily) to a problem, a plug for the drain down which network TV's bathwater was swirling.

It would be nice, after all that, to have one's expectations overturned by Leno's new venture, which premièred on September 14th, and that could still happen. In terms of ratings, the show doesn't have to do all that well in order for NBC to make money from it, but quality is another story. The forensic evidence so far indicates that a kind of death is taking place before our eyes; the only question is whether what we're witnessing is an accident or a crime scene. Despite the fact that Leno is a show-biz veteran, and that he and his team have had nine months or so to prepare (granted, for five of those months he was still busy working at his old job), the new show is full of bugs, and Leno seems louder, antsier, and more ill at ease than you want in a five-nights-a-week companion. Leno's job, as he has defined it, calls on him to be a showman, a presenter as much as a performer. The program has the format of a variety show, a creature that was virtually extinct decades ago, even before cable and the Internet. And there's a halting, clanking quality to it so far; if the show had an intermission, you might exchange a look with your date that said, "Should we leave? Do you want to leave? Let's leave." Leno may be confused about what the show is supposed to be, and it probably doesn't bring out the best in a person when his employer sends a message to the press that it expects to lose viewers and is just hoping not to lose too many. Networks put on bad shows every season, but, although we're now aware that they sometimes know ahead of time that a show is a dud (Jeff Zucker, the head of NBC, has admitted this), NBC's attitude toward "The Jay Leno Show" signals a whole new level of indifference, resignation, and laziness.

So what's new about Leno's show? Not the monologue: the first one had references to Cialis, Wilford Brimley, celebrity rehab, and Jay's cars. Leno enters through a set of glass doors, which seems rather corporate. (The second week of the show, the doors provided a mild sight gag—Paul Reubens, in Pee-wee Herman persona, banging into them.) Leno stands on a thrust platform to deliver his monologue; the platform has an image on it that will be familiar to people over fifty—it's a takeoff on the old black-and-white TV test-pattern designs. This one has the number "10" in the middle of it. Leno and NBC are really pushing the number ten—as in 10 P.M.—in an attempt to brand the hour as belonging to Leno. The number does double duty in the title of a regular segment, "Ten @ Ten," even though the segment is never actually shown at that hour; it comes later. It's a question-and-answer bit, wherein a celebrity on location somewhere is called up via satellite and asked

Jay Leno does his best to keep the Peacock network afloat with his new not-so-late-night comedy show.



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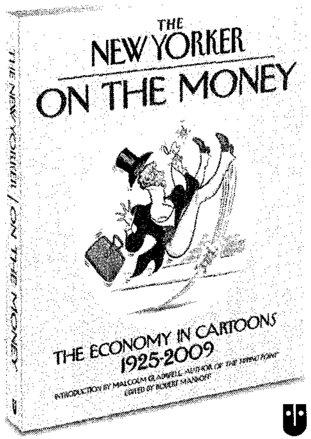
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ten questions that will supposedly elicit funny or edifying responses. Tom Cruise was asked if he had ever been to a strip club. ("No," he said—and the audience booed, a reaction I don't think I want to understand.) Amy Poehler was asked to name as many national parks as she could in fifteen seconds (because she stars in a show called "Parks and Recreation"). Mel Gibson was asked, I kid you not, "What is your favorite thing to eat for dinner?," "Where do you keep your Academy Awards?," and "Worst job you ever had?" Leno calls himself "a big-tent guy," but this isn't big-tent show business; this is the saddest of carnivals. It's always fun to be at a live taping, and yet even the people in Leno's studio audience don't seem engaged—or perhaps no one has thought to try to engage them. Except at the beginning of each show, when Jay shakes hands with the people seated in front, we never see the audience. (When Letterman engages with the audience, he does so to great effect, as he did last week when he riffed on a woman in the audience who had brought along a heart-shaped potato; President Obama was the guest that night, and he asked to see the potato. The bit became an instant YouTube and Facebook hit.)

All the late-night hosts work the same vein of current events, and often they do it in the same way, so Leno can't be criticized for the almost nightly mention of Kanye West his first week. Plus, it was a way to remind viewers (not that we had forgotten) that West happened to have appeared on Leno's first night—right after he had upstaged Taylor Swift at an awards show. But you still have to get the jokes right. A few days later, Leno said that West was doing an album with Taylor Swift called "Ebony and Apology." Shouldn't it have been "Apology and Ivory"?

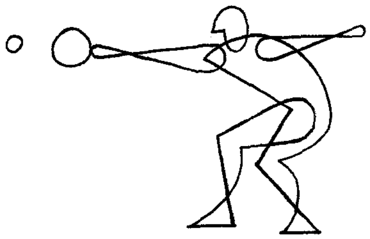
Speaking of ebony and ivory, though, when it comes to diversity Leno has the biggest tent of all the nighttime talk shows. Three of the regulars on the new show are black—D. L. Hughley, Dwayne Perkins, and a young comedian named Marina Franklin. (Larry Wilmore, a comedy writer and producer who talks about racial issues on Jon Stewart's show, is referred to as the show's "senior black correspondent"—the joke, and it's a good one, being the implication that there is, or ever would be, more than one. Well, there are now, on Leno's show.) Hughley went to Washington, D.C., to see if he could raise money for California—the sixty-eight dollars and change he made from a bake sale will be given to Governor Schwarzenegger the next time he's on the show. Franklin, who is not as polished as Hughley, did a remote in Harlem that was unexpected, and unexpectedly funny—it touched on gentrification and, fascinatingly, the great divide between black hair and what white people know about black hair. It took place partly inside a black-owned salon, and it was a glimpse into a world that most of Leno's audience isn't familiar with. Even more pointedly, there's a sardonic recurring bit in which Perkins singles out "Great White Moments in Black History," such as the precise time that black people stopped saying, "You go, girl!"—it was after Ricki Lake started using it on her talk show. In other diversity news, Leno's and the rest of the nighttime comedy shows are bizarrely lacking in women writers. Did a bomb go off and kill all the women comedy writers and leave the men standing? The other night on the Emmy Awards broadcast, the names of the nominees for best writing on a comedy or variety series were read, and, out of eighty-one people, only seven were women. Leno has no women writers on his show. Neither does David Letterman, and neither does Conan O'Brien. Come *on.*

Some of the remote segments of the Leno show—the ones that rely on celebrities appearing out of nowhere and adding famous-person fizz to the sketch—are well done, but more are excruciatingly long and labored. At the same time, there's a rushed feeling to the proceedings. Leno spent barely one second thanking Bruce Hornsby and Eric Clapton after they performed, despite having said that getting them was "kind of a coup," so that he could hit his nightly ten-minutes-to-the-hour mark—breaking for a promo for local news. While watching, you're always to some extent aware of the show's promotional nature, as you are with all such shows; and there is some overt humor on the subject—the stars who come on have to "earn" their plug by performing a task to Jay's satisfaction. Leno means well here, but NBC is merely using him as spackle. The show serves a function; it just doesn't serve any purpose. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

True Compass, *by Edward M. Kennedy (Twelve; $35).* It's hard to pinpoint the moment in this memoir when Ted Kennedy first seems like a grownup. It's later than it ought to be—well after his election to the Senate. You think he's there when he's the one who must tell their father that John F. Kennedy is dead, but that is followed by a drunken flight from Alaska and, worse, Chappaquiddick, which "haunts me every day of my life." Kennedy calls the idea that his own failings quieted him during the Clarence Thomas hearings an "urban legend," and, in some legend-building of his own, writes that J.F.K. was on the verge of straightening out Vietnam. He writes movingly about being the youngest of nine, and offers as loving a portrait of Joseph P. Kennedy as one is likely to read. By the end, he has grown up, and, consumed by his crusade for health care, credibly emerges as the political giant who was mourned last month.

A Paradise Built in Hell, *by Rebecca Solnit (Viking; $27.95).* Solnit's expansive argument about human resilience and community in times of crisis is bookended by accounts of two of the greatest natural disasters in American history: the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 and Hurricane Katrina. In both, the instinctive altruism and resourcefulness of local communities was overwhelmed by what disaster scholars call "élite panic"—the fear on the part of the powerful that the powerless will react with irrational violence. Though Solnit mobilizes decades of sociological research to support her argument, the chapters themselves move effortlessly through subtle philosophical readings and vivid narrations—such as the explosion, in 1917, of a munitions ship in Halifax, which threw six million pounds of material a thousand feet in the air, and killed fifteen hundred in "a shower of white-hot shrapnel." For all the darkness of her subject matter, Solnit emphasizes the utopian potential of what William James called a "civic temper," the drive not for individual survival but for meaningful community.



Blood's a Rover, *by James Ellroy (Knopf; $28.95).* The final novel of Ellroy's "Underworld U.S.A." trilogy, following "American Tabloid" and "The Cold Six Thousand," is a fittingly crazed and violent account of the years 1968 to 1972. Alternating chapters follow three henchmen with ties to a labyrinth of interconnected schemes—one cooks dope for Howard Hughes while facilitating his Vegas hotel takeover; another subverts black militant groups for J. Edgar Hoover; and the third kills revolutionaries in Cuba. Ellroy employs a huge cast and hyper-pulp prose to create a convincingly horrific universe run by the F.B.I., the Mob, and a host of other sinister organizations. The unrelenting violence and double-crossing grows exhausting, but, in a work of this scope, exhaustion is surely part of Ellroy's agenda. His description of one of his burnt-out tough guys could be a portrait of his ideal reader: "His eyes hurt. He kept seeing word prisms. His fingers were paper-cut."

Gone to the Dogs, *by Mary Guterson (St. Martin's; $13.99).* This irreverent novel inverts the romantic-farce convention of the hero as lovable loser. Here it's the heroine who's the ambitionless slob, a grad-school dropout treading water as a waitress and living in a pigsty of an apartment. When she's eighty-sixed by her jock fiancé for an Amazonian whitewater-kayaking enthusiast, she's propelled into action: she kidnaps the new girlfriend's dog. With expert deadpan, Guterson keeps the premise from getting too cute. The heroine recalls her history of pet ownership, beginning with the gerbils that made "clear even to the mind of an eleven-year-old the stark aloneness of existence, the prison in which we all must live and eventually die."

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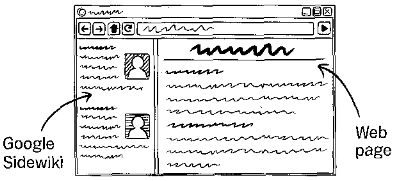

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BRAIN DRAIN

The scientific fictions of Richard Powers.

BY JAMES WOOD

The fiction of Richard Powers sometimes resembles a dying satyr—above the waist is a mind full of serious thought, philosophical reflection, deep exploration of music and science; below, a pair of spindly legs strain to support the great weight of the ambitious brain. Powers thinks, and thinks well, and his almost nostalgic devotion to the European modernist tradition of "The Magic Mountain" and "The Man Without Qualities" makes him rare in American fiction. In his best books, "The Gold Bug Variations" (1991) and "Galatea 2.2" (1995), he displays an impressive command of the languages of music, genetics, computer science, and neurology, but more exciting is his willingness to engage in abstract thought, to argue and persevere, to carry arguments through the rooms of logic. ("The Gold Bug Variations," in particular, contains several profound essays on Bach.) Contemporary American novelists, compared with Powers, can seem like intellectual visitors, fiddling in the foyers of the mind.

The intellectual stakes are high, but, unfortunately, the novelistic means are limited. In his novels, Powers generally likes to keep two plots going. One story line poses, and tries to solve, a relatively abstract puzzle: Does the human mind function like a computer? Does genetics offer the best explanation of "the riddle of life"? What is the nature of consciousness? The second story line is almost always boy-meets-girl, in which protagonists connected to the first plot meet and fall in love or lust. The idea is that the messiness of human interaction deepens and complicates the initial abstract puzzle, and will always offer its own, ragged solution to that puzzle. The traditional domain of the novel—eros, marriage, the question of children, the irreducible particulars of domestic life—is made to intrude on the hushed lab of science and mind, so that one area of life cannot be properly envisaged without the other.

These two story lines are made dismayingly explicit, nowhere more so than in "Galatea 2.2." That novel tells the story of "Richard Powers," a thirty-five-year-old American novelist who is spending a year at the science research center of a Midwestern university. He and a brilliant scientist, Philip Lentz, decide to build a simulated brain, by linking together various computer systems that will imitate the processes of the human mind. Lentz and Powers want to see if this artificial brain can learn to read, and intelligently appraise, the kinds of Great Books that the Powers character himself read as a graduate student at the university. Meanwhile, in the novel's second plot, the Richard Powers character becomes obsessed with a graduate student who reminds him of his former lover. He is ashamed of the age difference:

> For months, my bedtime stories had spun a decameron of long-term potentiation, recategorizing, neuronal group selection, transmitter and junctional molecules. Now, for some reason, my low-level structures, blinded by the harsh light that life's interrogation used to extract its confessions, decided to pull an Aschenbach. A Humbert Humbert. One of those old fools in Chaucer, Shakespeare, Restoration comedy, nineteenth-century epistolary vicarage farces. I meant to make an idiot of myself.

Powers is an ambitious novelist, but he is also ambitious for clarity, and is never afraid to spell things out. And here it is: on the one hand, high-level ratiocination, and, on the other, the "low-level" system of rutting and coupling. His mating plots tend toward the banal, and are written in a prose that is at once showy and anxiously explanatory ("decided to pull an Aschenbach"). So his novels lead double lives, in which the sophistication of his ideas is constantly overwhelming the rather primitive stylistic and narrative machinery; the reader has to learn to switch voltages, like a busy international traveller. What falls in the gap is any subtlety of insight into actual human beings. In Powers's world, scientists always sound like scientists; they never speak or act against type. The geneticist Dr. Stuart Ressler, in "The Gold Bug Variations," arrives to begin a research job at Urbana, and thinks thus about his first, solitary dinner: "For dinner, tomato juice minus gin: alcohol is a trace mutagen and destroys brain cells. The department must wonder why he hasn't come by to introduce himself. That's all right; wonder is the trump of the twenty-three-pair chromosome set." As Pushkin complained about Byron, do his conspirators have to do *everything* in a conspiratorial manner?

Along with this relentless approach to characterization is a fondness for the most stolid elements of old-fashioned realism, such as the "filler" that writers like to slip onto the page, to vary and explicate exchanges between characters. In "The Echo Maker" (2006), one loses count of how many times someone raises an eyebrow, or sadly smiles, or shakes a head: "She shook her head sadly and stacked the dirty dishes." "Hayes raised an eyebrow." "That single, arch Gillespie eyebrow." "He tilts an eyebrow at her." "He shook his head, a little sadly." "He shrugged and shook his head, apologetic."

> "Does he sound different?"
>
> She studied the air. "Slower. Mark was always a fast talker."
>
> "Does he search for words? Have you noticed any difference in his vocabulary?"
>
> Her lopsided smile returned. "Aphasia, you mean?"
>
> She botched the pronunciation. Weber just nodded.

Powers is always prompting his people, as in this exchange from his novel "Gain" (1998):

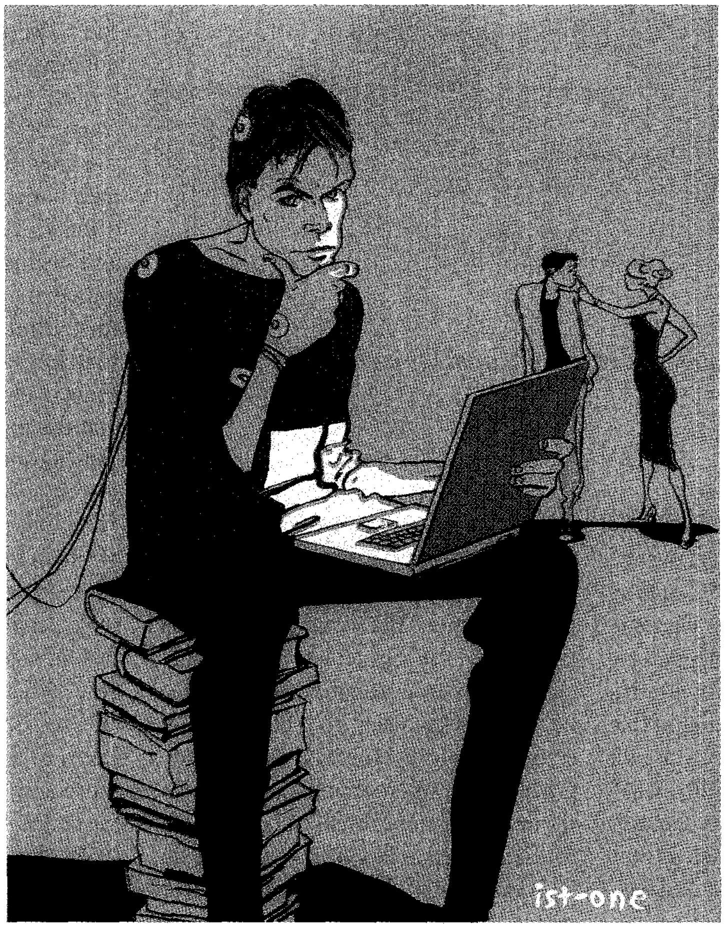
> "Don't yell at me. I didn't do anything."
>
> "I'm not yelling." Furious, because he doesn't even know who to be angry at. "I'm not yelling."

All realist writers do a bit of this, reflexively, but these over-helpful adverbs and adjectives suggest a writer afraid to let the reader decide what is going on. And the difficulty with authorial explanation of this kind is where to stop: one could always be doing more of it, in more debased ways. Here is Gerald Weber, the middle-aged neurologist in "The Echo Maker," kissing his wife:

> They kissed again. Amazing that the gesture still communicated so much, after three

> decades. He held back a lock of her mocha hair and grazed her forehead. Her hair was thinner than it had been in college, when they'd met. How searchingly beautiful she'd been. But lovelier to him now, at peace with herself at last. Lovelier, because graying.

This is the prose equivalent of the Lifetime channel—trashy ("mocha hair"), with a smear of pretension ("searchingly beautiful"). It gets prizes, or gets nominated for prizes ("The Echo Maker" won the 2006 National Book Award), precisely because it is hiding in plain sight: it sounds like every other middlebrow realist novelist, and so probably something like the Novel itself.



Powers is fascinated by the relationship between matter and mind.

Powers's new book, "Generosity" (Farrar, Straus; $25), his most schematic and coarse, exaggerates the weaknesses of his better work. It, too, poses an abstract puzzle: "Is human happiness explicable?" One day, a young Algerian woman named Thassadit Amzwar walks into a creative-writing class run by a failed thirty-two-year-old writer, Russell Stone. Although her father was assassinated, and she is a refugee from the intense violence and civil strife of Algiers, Thassa is improbably happy. As she tells her fellow-students all about Algeria, "she laughs as she talks, as if she hadn't just treated them all to a misery that would have broken saints." Her euphoria mystifies and dazzles her teacher: "Just the sound of her voice is like a governor's pardon." Russell goes home and does some research. Could Thassa be suffering from some kind of post-traumatic stress disorder, in which she is blissfully repressing her pain? Or perhaps she has hyperthymia, a psychological condition of "constant mania without the depression"? When Russell hears Thassa extoll the beauty of her native land, its mountains and coast, he is dumbfounded:

> "Nature?" He can't keep the bafflement out of his voice. A child of death who's thrilled about the future. An Algerian who shuns politics. A film lover who chooses the banality of mountains.

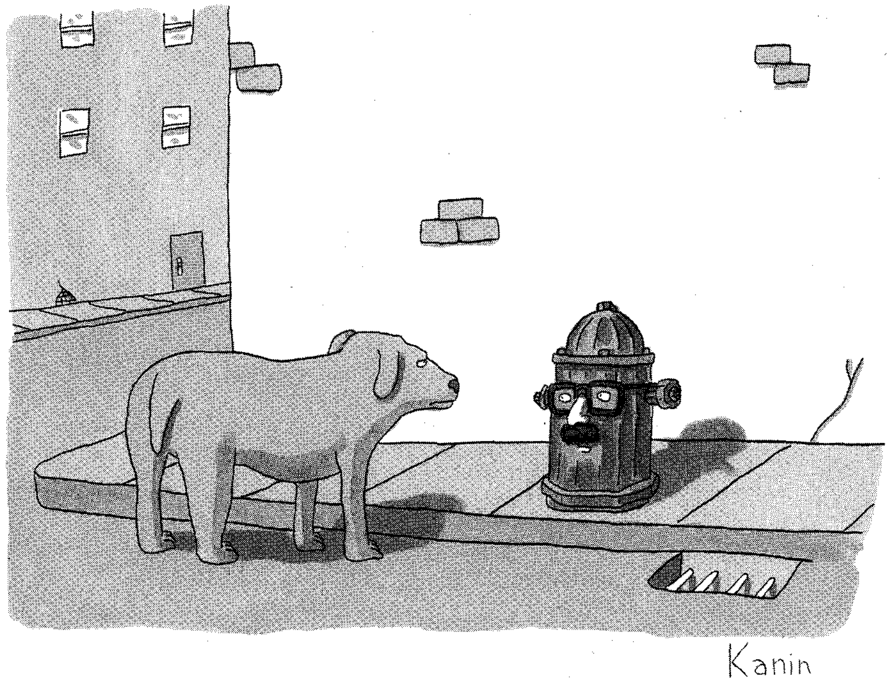
Russell decides to consult with an expert, a college psychologist named Candace Weld. Thus begins one of Powers's familiar secondary plotlines: Russell and Candace must get together. As they do.

One early problem is that Russell's bemusement and his rapid recourse to medical explanation make him seem a shallow student of human affairs. He is thinking like a Richard Powers novel, in which scientists must sound always like scientists, and political refugees must sound always like political refugees. The idea that someone, for whatever mysterious reason, might behave against type—"An Algerian who shuns politics," of all things!—seems to turn him almost insane with dim-witted suspicion. Russell's shallowness becomes the novel's, too, since it is just as invested as he is in doltishly solving the great "riddle" of Thassa's happiness.

Candace Weld believes that neither science nor medicine will explain Thassa's freakish jollity. She thinks instead that the Algerian's benevolence is metaphysical—she "had *found* something about how best to be alive." Nevertheless, she arranges for Thassa to meet Thomas Kurton, a Craig Venter-like entrepreneurial geneticist who runs a biotech firm in Boston. Kurton does his tests on Thassa, and announces that his subject's chromosomes are indeed coded for happiness: Thassa has an "optimal allele assortment—the happiness jackpot." Although Kurton is careful to qualify his findings, the media conclude, in a flurry, that he has found "the happiness gene." Thassa becomes a celebrity, and accepts an offer of thirty-two thousand dollars for the harvesting of her eggs. She goes on an Oprah-style chat show. But the pressure almost breaks her. She flees with Russell for the Canadian border, and tries to commit suicide in a motel room, an attempt that nicely provides the novel's answer to its own original bogus "enigma": happiness may be partly chromosomal and determined, but it is also mysteriously environmental, temperamental, and so on.

"Generosity" is subtitled not "A Novel," but "An Enhancement," perhaps Powers's way of demoting the book a rank or two, as with Graham Greene's "Entertainments." It is also, we are led to infer, the book that Russell Stone will begin to write about his former student, and, as Stone is himself a failed writer, perhaps Powers thought that mimetic fidelity compelled him to compose a failure, too. A less postmodern explanation might be the now reasonably well-known fact that Powers has for some time been writing fiction by dictation, with the help of speech-recognition software. Not enough help, alas: on the current evidence, he also needs bullshit-recognition software. The prose, dictated or otherwise, reads as if it had been written by an Orientalist Tom Wolfe. Thassa is, it seems, as old as epochs: "She's twenty-three . . . give or take an era," Powers declaims. She brings sweetmeats

IVAN BANYAI



"A fire hydrant, you say? No, but I'll keep my eyes peeled."

to class: "They nibble at Thassa's *timchepoucht*, which tastes of ancient oases." Later, she cooks for Russell and Candace; he can smell "the travelogue aromas issuing from down the hall." Travelogue aromas! This is travelogue writing, and it's anything but fragrant. Everything in this book is exaggerated and primary-colored: "A shudder crests across Russell's skull." "His heart tries to kickbox its way through his sternum." "His soul stretched as taut as shrink-wrap." An English medical ethicist who is an old foe of Thomas Kurton's scientific triumphalism is described as having "sad bloodhound eyes": "Her face is lined by a lifetime spent gate-guarding science's worst excesses." (In Powers's novelistic phrenology, just as scientists always sound like scientists, watchful ethicists look watchful and ethical.) Thomas Kurton is sketched journalistically, as David Brooks might glance at him in an Op-Ed column: Kurton, we are told, "showed all the signs" in childhood of early scientific brilliance—"the model rocketry, the ham radios, the long afternoons gazing into tidal pools, the complete Herbert S. Zim Golden Guides." As a teen-ager, he read the great British geneticist J. B. S. Haldane, and got his first microscope. A full scholarship took him to Cornell. "In short," Powers concludes, "Kurton's genes might have led him to genomics, no matter what environment threw at him. But environment pulled all the right triggers, at just the right times. All the right teachers, the right toys, the right texts in the right order." Powers is scientifically literate—he switched his major from physics to literature, and for a time worked as a computer programmer—but his reverence for the autistic "genius" of his fictional scientists has a certain fanboy ingenuousness.

"Generosity" is a slimmer, hastier, more crowd-pleasing book than anything Powers has yet written. Perhaps it is just a quick folly between more considered works. Still, in insidious ways it diminishes its better predecessors. One can't help noticing, for instance, that Powers borrows and adapts his own novelistic template. As with the earlier work, the novelist establishes an exaggerated opposition between science and the humanities, determinism and free will, so that a rigged argument can proceed, in which both extremes are rightly rejected. There is the pure scientific answer, and there is the pure humanistic answer. Either Thassa's happiness can be chemically explained away or it can't be. Thomas Kurton is on the scientism side: "Kurton has never doubted that happiness is chemical." Candace Weld, who thinks that science can explain nothing about Thassa, is on the humanist side. Russell, veering between biological and humanistic explanations, is somewhere in the middle.

"Galatea 2.2" functions similarly. To the question "What is human intelligence?," there are initially two opposing answers. The scientist, Philip Lentz, at first favors a purely computer-driven explanation: "The brain, Lentz had it, was itself just a glorified, fudged-up Turing machine." The Richard Powers character, the novelist, is on the other side. "You're not elevating the machine. You're debasing us," he complains to Lentz. In the course of the book, the computer that the two men build begins to develop genuinely human qualities. It "announces" that it misses Powers; it wants to be sung to, and begins to take on the properties of human memory. Both men grow fond of this simulacrum of a brain, and each switches emotional sides: the Richard Powers character eventually concludes that the machine has what can be called consciousness, while Lentz becomes more skeptical. A similar binarism is at work in "The Echo Maker," which tells the story of a man from Nebraska, Mark Schluter, who, after a terrible car accident, is stricken with Capgras syndrome: he is convinced that his sister is an impostor. To the question "What is consciousness?," the hospital's resident neurologist, Dr. Hayes, seems to represent one medical extreme: consciousness is no more than the sum of the brain's neurological parts. "All I know is what happened to his brain early on the morning of February 20," he says. Mark's sister, incoherent and medically illiterate, and angered by Hayes's narrowness, represents the opposite viewpoint. Gerald Weber, an Oliver Sacks-like neurologist from New York who arrives to examine Mark, stands for the flexible middle position, in which neurology and literature can coexist: "The rapid convergence of neuroscience around certain functionalist assumptions was beginning to alienate Weber." As a result, Weber feels that his brand of storytelling is becoming obsolete: "Instruments, images, tests, metrics, surgery, pharmaceuticals: no room left for Weber's anecdotes."

Powers's scientism issues in a marked predilection for describing human motivation as the product of biology. We are all, in the end, "low-level structures." In "Galatea 2.2," the Richard

Powers character is amorously obsessed not only with his female graduate student but with the artificial brain he has helped build, which he calls Helen. Gerald Weber repeatedly returns to Nebraska, partly to see Mark Schluter but also to pursue an erotic quest for Mark's mysterious and alluring nurse, Barbara Gillespie. In "The Gold Bug Variations," Stuart Ressler becomes intoxicated with the study of genetics at the same time that he becomes intoxicated with his colleague Dr. Jeanette Koss. For Powers, erotic and scientific quests are both biological at root, so his dual plots work rather like the two story lines in "101 Dalmatians": if the two dogs' owners, the man and the woman, manage to meet and mate, then so will the dogs. Powers is never more repetitive than when he is describing love or lust as a species of determinism. As Ressler bends to kiss Koss, "every program in his body, every enzyme, every gemule collaborates on synthesizing a single biophor: take this woman and kiss her." When the Richard Powers character first gets close to the graduate student who consumes his thoughts, he recalls, "My skin went conductive. In the time it took me to drop another step, a bouillabaisse of chemical semaphores seeped up through my pores and spilled out to wet the air." As Weber kisses Barbara for the first time, "he surges on the dopamine, the spikes of endorphins, his chest jerking. . . . He slips down into limbic back alleys. . . . They flood each other, waves of oxytocin and a savage bonding."

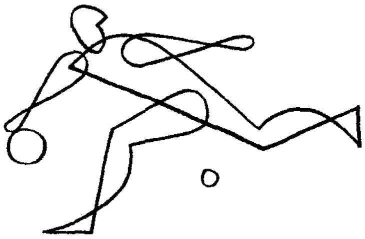
Powers's latest novel is even more emphatic in this regard than its predecessors. When Russell first catches sight of Candace, there is an immediate attraction: "the massive spray of fight-or-flight hormones cascading through his limbs proves it." His eventual alliance with her is foretold by his biology. Lying in her bed, he smells "her gamey scent. He has read how people choose their mates on smell and some sixth sense, a pheromone whiff off histocompatibility complexes other than their own, but recognized. He was doomed to end up here, in her bed, from the moment they sniffed each other."

And so on. The twist is that this biological determinism is what produces the apparently "free" human messiness of the erotic narratives. For instance, the narrator of "The Gold Bug Variations" is trying to answer a human conundrum: Why did Dr. Ressler abandon, in the late nineteen-fifties, a brilliant early career in genetic research? The answer, provided near the end of the novel, is that Ressler fell desperately in love with Jeanette Koss but couldn't pursue the relationship, because Koss was already married. To avert the breakup of her marriage, Koss informs Ressler that she is leaving the university and moving away, with her husband. As a consequence, Ressler also decides to leave the research team, in part because he realizes that life is just too large and multifarious to be explained by one area of study:

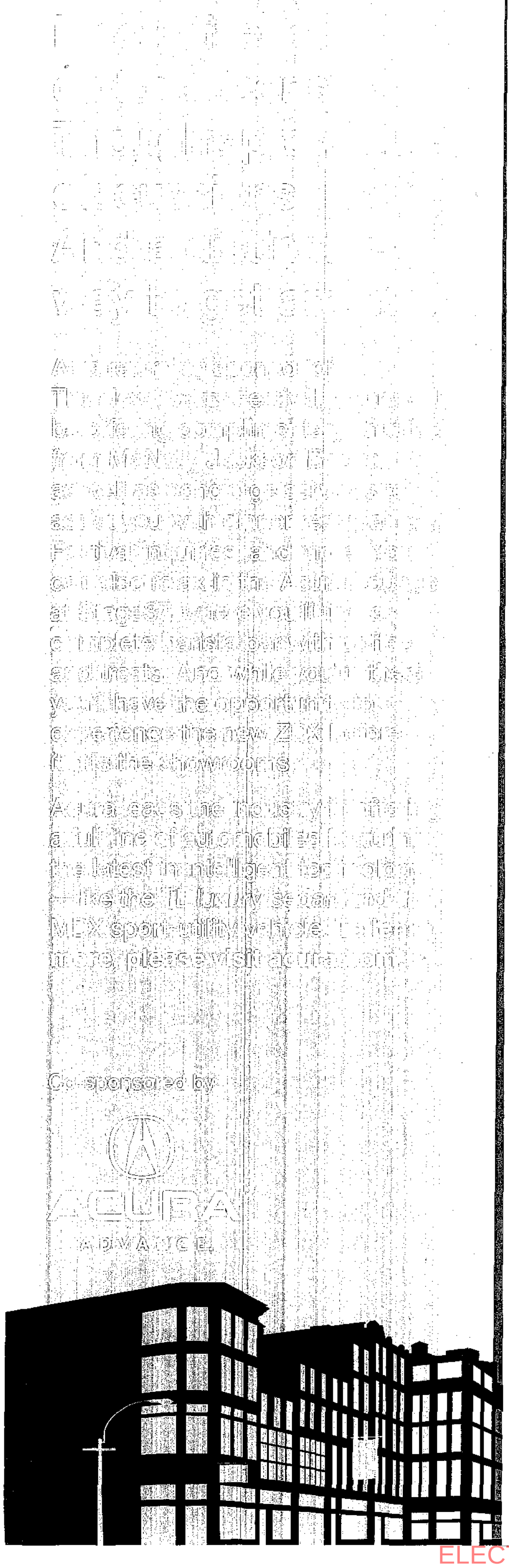
> By the time he gets to campus, it's clear, as clear as anything will ever be in the rough translation allotted him. The self-serving, pointless duplication of giant molecules created him in its own image, set him down here with only one order: Do science. Postulate. Put together a working model. Yet the hunt for the single, substantiating thread running through all creation is just a start. It's time for science to acknowledge the heft, bruise, and hopeless muddle of the world's irreducible particulars.

Under the fancy language is an all-too-clear message: biology (our "giant molecules") made Ressler a biologist. But biology (endorphins, limbic back alleys) also pushes us into human relationships and encounters (erotic, amorous) that have a way of messing things up—this is the "heft, bruise, and hopeless muddle of the world's irreducible particulars." So one kind of biology "made" Ressler a biologist; another kind of biology "made" him decide to swerve from what he was put on earth to do, and abandon his work as a biologist. We are determined—programmed—to be humanly messy.

Who could possibly argue with a view of life that combines a squeeze of determinism with a shake of liberty? There is nothing offensive in the familiar paradox that our apparent human freedom is highly overdetermined. Powers always discovers the happy and humane mixture, in which human beings are revealed to be a combination of the unfree and the free, the chemical and the non-chemical, the given and the found, the animal and the human. But one feels that he alights on his humane median only by making each side of that median extreme and impossible. And, after the real brilliance of Powers's mastery of various disciplinary idioms, this humane middle can seem milkily bland, perfectly inoffensive. "Generosity" ends in just this bet-hedging spirit. Thomas Kurton's scientific certainty has been properly cast into doubt by Thassa's nervous breakdown and near-suicide, but the novel closes with the information that Thassa has successfully sold her eggs, and that a child with her genetics has been born. So, Powers seems to say, we shall have to wait and see which is determinative of happiness, nature or nurture; for now, however, at novel's close, the answer must be, happily enough, "a bit of both."



Much great fiction has been involved in working out the relationship between determinism and human agency; you could argue that this is fiction's special province. Dreiser and Hardy were convinced determinists, but as novelists they were able to animate the fates of their characters, so that freedom and unfreedom were in dramatic, fateful play with each other. The scientifically literate French novelist Michel Houellebecq has managed the cunning paradox of espousing a violent anti-humanism while bringing to bleakly vivid life real human pathos and despair. Richard Powers compares poorly with these writers: his fictional work constantly asserts the importance of the human while never quite succeeding in enacting it. He makes beautiful connections between concepts (genetics, music, computers, consciousness, memory), but primitive and mechanistic connections between his characters. Indeed, his novels are not so much examinations of human motive as documents of bewilderment about human motive. Again and again, Powers finds himself drawn to a characterological enigma, the various answers to which he then sorts through, like a good researcher. But these enigmas arise in the first place only because he begins with such a basic concept of human motive. Richard Powers's novels are thus unwitting, even anxious confessions of their own inability to animate his characters. So they circle around their lack, animals not quite willing to shun their own dead. ♦



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MUSICAL EVENTS

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"Tosca" at the Met.

BY ALEX ROSS

It takes a certain effort to suck the life out of "Tosca." No other opera in the repertory is so immaculately crafted to deliver its thrills on cue. Revolutionary sentiment seethes in royalist Rome; a famed diva, in love with a rebel artist, confronts a Te Deum-singing, sexually slobbering chief of police; the villain is stabbed with a dinner knife, the lover falls to a firing squad, the diva leaps to her death while screaming about God. Each act unfolds in real time, in precisely mapped locales, with no major improbabilities impeding the flow of events. The music is both refined and brutal, late-Romantic opulence pinned to raw action. If a director purchases sufficient quantities of papier-mâché to suggest the settings specified in the libretto, and if singers and orchestral players merely approximate the notes in the score, you are assured of a passable evening's entertainment. If you happen to have Maria Callas and Tito Gobbi on hand to play the diva and the heavy, you get high-low bliss, like a B movie directed by Rembrandt.

"Tosca" has played at the Metropolitan Opera almost nine hundred times, and until last week, when a new staging by the Swiss director Luc Bondy was unveiled, the company pretty much stuck to the script. For more than twenty years, audiences swooned over a Franco Zeffirelli production, in which the Roman settings—the Church of Sant'Andrea Della Valle, the interior of the Palazzo Farnese, and the top of the Castel Sant'Angelo—were re-created in fanatically ornate detail. Like most Zeffirelli stagings of the eighties and nineties, it was a Cecil B. De Mille affair, with supernumeraries running amok. Nonetheless, it was handsome to behold, at times magnificently chilling. I was one of thousands mesmerized by a "Live from the Met" telecast in 1985, starring Plácido Domingo and the late Hildegard Behrens. I last saw the show in 2005, with Aprile Millo, one of the few working Toscas who have the right verismo bite in their voice, chewing up as much of the scenery as she could stomach.

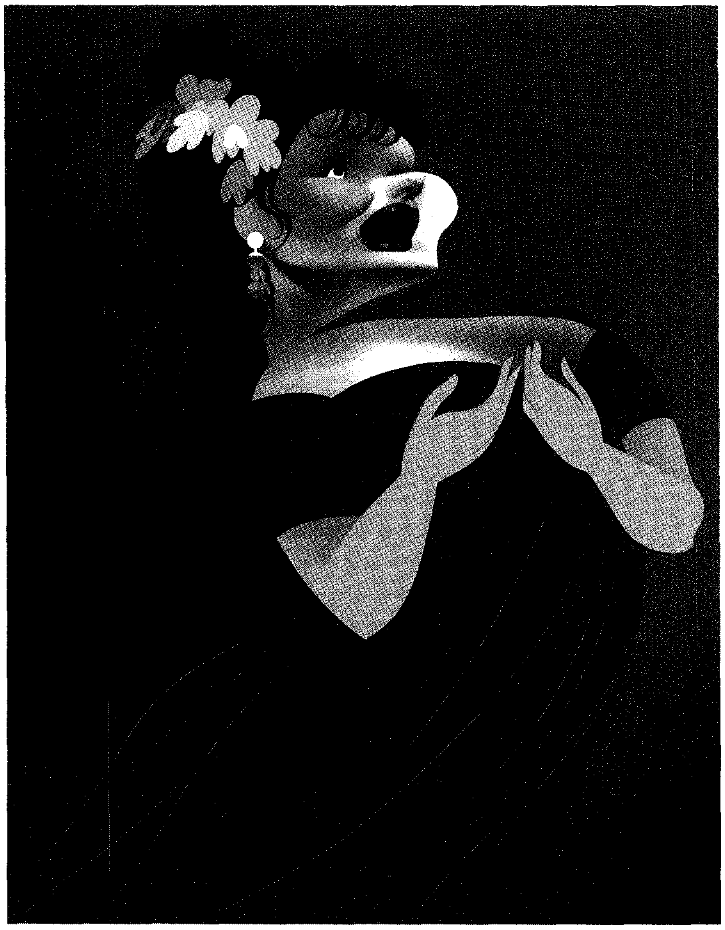
When Peter Gelb took over as the general manager of the Met, in 2006, he made it clear that he wanted a more agile sensibility—opera as live theatre rather than diorama. Inevitably, he has begun to discard the Zeffirelli spectaculars that have long ruled the house. I might have started by getting rid of the chintzy "Traviata" or the cutesy "Bohème," but Gelb was within his rights to go after "Tosca." No production is sacrosanct, and connoisseurs have long complained that Zeffirelli isn't nearly as faithful to the composers' intentions as he likes to claim. We can be sure that Verdi would have loathed the idea of an extended pause for a scenery change in the middle of Act II of "Traviata." Puccini almost certainly would have rejected a split-level approach to Act III of "Tosca," with Cavaradossi, Tosca's lover, singing about the stars in a dungeon. (Zeffirelli in his younger days was another matter: his direction of Callas and Gobbi in Act II of "Tosca," as seen on a 1964 telecast from Covent Garden, is remarkable both for its attention to detail and for its ferocious formal control.)

By all means, then, let's have a new "Tosca." But it needs to be good. And this is not. Although Bondy has conceived potent stagings of "Salome," "Don Carlos," and Handel's "Hercules," among other operas, he has failed to find a clear angle on "Tosca," and instead delivered an uneven, muddled, weirdly dull production that interferes fatally with the working of Puccini's perfect contraption. Karita Mattila was miscast in the title role. No one else sang with particular distinction. By the end of opening night, Gelb had on his hands a full-blown fiasco, with boos resounding from the orchestra seats, the upper galleries, and even the plaza outside, where people had watched on a screen for free. You could almost hear Zeffirelli laughing from his villa.

The sets are by Richard Peduzzi. The church in Act I consists mainly of featureless gray brick walls, as if a gut renovation were under way. Historical cues are vague: Cavaradossi wears a modern-seeming raincoat, Scarpia's henchmen are outfitted with what might be called Victorian psychedelia (top hats, dark granny glasses, canes), and Tosca enters in an eccentric thrift-shop assemblage of no obvious provenance. The lighting is dim without being atmospheric. All the same, the set serves the action, and an impressively sinister Te Deum procession closes the act: priests and altar boys advance in a thick crowd behind Scarpia—a chorus line of malignant power.

Things get goofy when we arrive at the Palazzo Farnese. At the start of Act II, Scarpia is attended by no fewer than three prostitutes. Such neon-sign direction condescends to singers and audience alike: are we too stupid to recognize that Scarpia is a lecher? (Gobbi said it all with his eyes.) Tosca's struggle with Scarpia has a gutsy violence to it, but an awkwardly elongated stage layout saps the tension. The major gaffe of the night comes after Tosca kills Scarpia, when, according to the libretto, she places candles by his side and a crucifix on his chest. This business predates the opera, having been invented for Sarah Bernhardt in "La Tosca," the play by Victorien Sardou, and it need not be retained. Yet *something* should happen during the thirty-bar postlude that Puccini composed for the ritual. And it should involve Scarpia, whose signature chords echo in the orchestra. Here Tosca climbs onto the windowsill, apparently with the thought of ending the opera an hour early; turns back to utter the line "Before him trembled all of Rome"; returns to the window; and then picks up the Marchesa Attavanti's fan and retires to the couch. Tosca murders, then dithers.

Act III is recession-era Zeffirelli, with a few soldiers marching about and a plain tower rising to the right. Cavaradossi is shot without suspense. Tosca runs up a flight of stairs into the tower, and then a stunt double leaps from a window and, thanks to a wire, stops in midair. At first, this looked like a comic malfunction, but a freeze-frame effect was apparently intended, as at the end of "Thelma and Louise." While there is nobility in an ambitious failure, there is no glory in ineptitude.



Karita Mattila, the Finnish soprano, was miscast in the title role.

ANDRE CARRILHO

Mattila, the Finnish soprano who has given the Met many blazing performances over the past decade or so, threw herself into the melee with her customary fervor. Yet she ran into vocal trouble on opening night. Although she had no difficulty making herself heard above the orchestra, her tone sounded frayed at the top of the range, and a wobble intruded at the end of "Vissi d'arte." She is not an Italian singer born. Certain Tosca-isms that should explode from the mouth—"*Assassino!*" "*Quanto?*" "*Presto, su! Mario!*"—were obscured in the Nordic dusk of the voice. Still, her unflagging commitment kept alive hope that the evening would redeem itself, even if that moment never came.

Marcelo Álvarez, as Cavaradossi, placated the crowd with prolonged high notes. He lacked lustre in quieter passages and extracted little poetry from "E lucevan le stelle." George Gagnidze, a Georgian baritone who stepped in as Scarpia on short notice, acted with snaky vigor and etched some of his lines effectively, but lost power in the Te Deum sequence. The bass-baritone David Pittsinger, singing strongly as the political prisoner Angelotti, might have done better as Scarpia. James Levine drew rich colors from the orchestra, yet his slow tempos contributed to the grimness of the night.

Opera being a delightfully paradoxical medium, this whole debacle left me in an upbeat mood. The Met is refusing to repeat itself and is seeking, by trial and error, a new theatrical identity. One or two meetings might be in order to determine how things went awry, and once Bondy is safely on the plane back home it should be relatively easy to devise new stage business to replace his lamer notions. The audience was, at least, paying attention. If I'm not mistaken, someone shouted "*Vergogna!*"—"Shame!"—when the production team shuffled onstage to face the firing squad. I doubt that mass revulsion is part of Gelb's marketing plan, but a scandal has its uses: the Met made the evening news. ♦

THERE'LL ALWAYS BE AN ENGLAND

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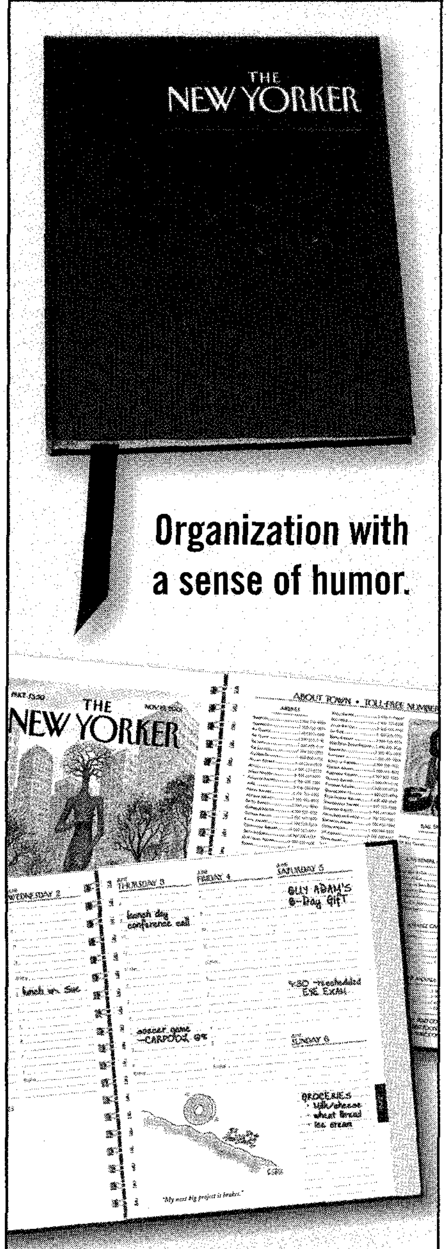

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THE THEATRE

THE BLACK MAN COMETH

Peter Sellars's take on the Moor.

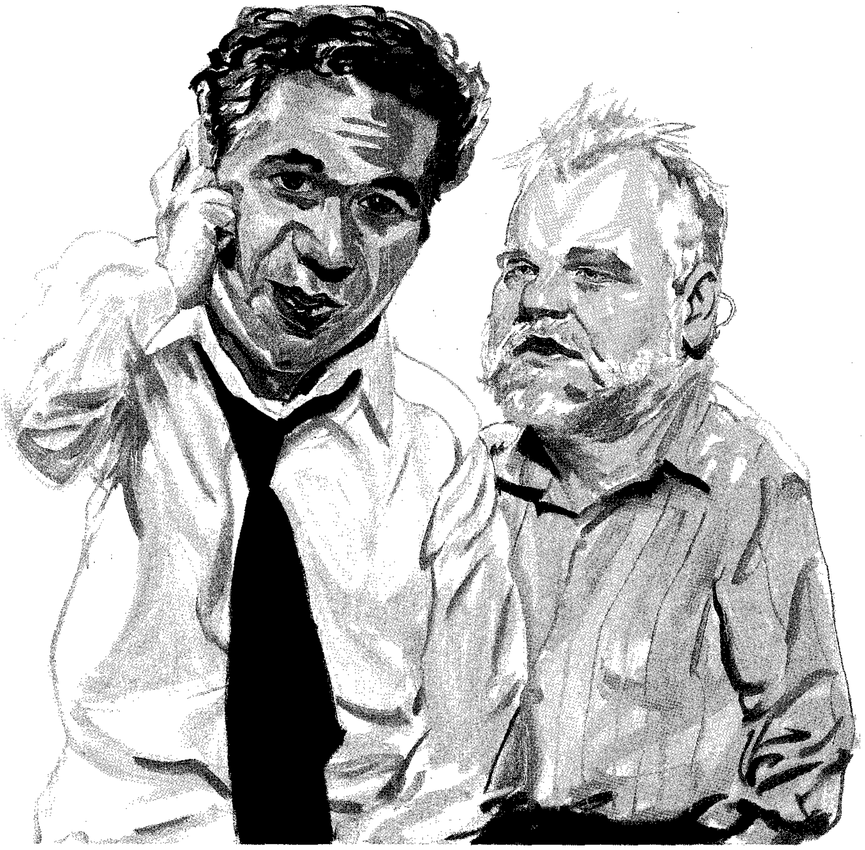
BY HILTON ALS

Sometimes a writer's language can put off even the most devoted reader. A late-summer dip into Ernest Hemingway's early novels, say, can leave you feeling doused in cold water every time you come across the word "nigger" in his mostly white fictional world. And the various spooky black figures who rise like obscuring vapors in certain works by authors ranging from John Osborne to Saul Bellow can curtail your visits to those writers' shelves. Far too often, readers of color have to police the pages, instead of immersing themselves in the solitary beauty of reading. In 1994, a journalist asked Toni Morrison, "When you encountered racial stereotypes in the classics of American literature—in Ernest Hemingway or Willa Cather or William Faulkner—how did you deal with them?" Morrison responded, "I skipped that part. Read over it. Because I loved those books. . . . So when they said these things that were profoundly racist, I forgave them." But sometimes love is not enough to overcome the "nigger" in an author's mind.

It's sad to think that readers of color may even avoid "Othello," one of Shakespeare's greatest plays, because they've seen in some theatre class the strange hash that Laurence Olivier and his director, Stuart Burge, made of the play in their 1965 film version. (Olivier's sooty-faced Moor is alternately ooga-booga scary and uncomprehending.) In fact, "Othello" has been central to the debate about how blackness is perceived—and misperceived—by white writers and their audiences. The play was written in 1604, at a time when in English society "black skin color was understood . . . primarily within a symbolic logic," the Shakespeare scholar Daniel Vitkus writes. What blackness symbolized then was evil and barbarity, the unknown from the wilds of North Africa washed up on the shores of civilization. (In 1584, Reginald Scot wrote, "A damned soul may and doth take the shape of a black moor." Queen Elizabeth I called for the deportation of "blackamoors" from her green land.) Othello's considerable confidence forbids him to buy into any of this—at first. But, by the end of the play, he has come to accept and even absorb his peers' view of who he is, or is supposed to be. Although he begs the white men around him to "speak of me as I am," he turns their fear and repulsion inward, where it eats away at his soul. Twice betrayed, he takes on a language that is not his own: he is defined not by himself but by his vindictive ensign, Iago; by his rival Roderigo; and by Brabantio, Desdemona's father, who cannot bear the idea of "an old black ram . . . tupping" his "white ewe."

As the play begins, the Duke of Venice dispatches Othello, a decorated war hero, to protect Cyprus from the Turks. Once there, Iago, who feels he has been passed over for a promotion, puts into action a plan to destroy the man he serves. Swiftly, he drives Othello into a fit of paranoid jealousy by suggesting that Desdemona has been cuckolding Othello with his loyal lieutenant, Cassio. Violence, sex, acting out, internalizing the judgment of others: Othello becomes, in Cyprus's rocky terrain, Bigger Thomas's elder. And, like Bigger, he is essentially an existentialist figure, at once empty and full.

It is precisely those traits that the director Peter Sellars emphasizes in his staging of the play (a co-production of the Public and the LAByrinth Theatre Company, at N.Y.U.'s Skirball Center). The main element on the large black stage is a bed made up of video screens on which we sometimes see flowers or clouds drifting by—natural elements that emphasize both the emotional content of a scene and the cold, highly industrialized staging. Sellars has set the play in the present day and has cut it back. The streamlined show, however, still runs for almost four hours—so what has Sellars added? His thought process, mostly. The prolific Sellars has, over the years, been both acclaimed and reviled for his liberal reinterpretations of classic plays and operas. (In 1989, he set Mozart's "Così fan Tutte" at a diner in Cape Cod.) With opera, if you don't like the staging you can close your eyes and listen to the music. Shakespeare's music, on the other hand, is not distinct from his narratives or from the actors' behavior; we need to both see and hear his characters' intentions. Which means, unavoidably, that Othello *must* be black. By casting the light-skinned Latino actor John Ortiz—who could easily be Venetian—in the title role, Sellars says he has tried to shift the focus away from "racial hierarchies" in order to explore what the "realities and possibilities" of the play may be for "the Obama generation." But would the play really mean less if Sellars had cast, say, Jeffrey Wright in the role? Does having a non-black Othello truly make you confront your own prejudices? Has Sellars unintentionally given in to the racism that sometimes infects the white-oriented theatrical avant-garde?



John Ortiz and Philip Seymour Hoffman as Othello and his bitter henchman.

PHILIP BURKE

Ortiz has a softness that is apt at times, and he is helped immeasurably by Jessica Chastain, who finds a beautiful maternal depth in Desdemona. But when he's not being soft he is braying in a solipsistic manner. And what skills he has get lost amid the computer screens, the offstage bleeps, the dialogue conveyed via cell phone—and all the other tricked-up aspects of this production. You feel as though you were watching not the play you've read but a sketch for an idea about a play.

While many have said that "Othello" should really be called "Iago," Philip Seymour Hoffman makes you wish that there were no Iago at all. Watching his loud, bloated performance, you can't help wondering if he'd just graduated from the Al Pacino School of Acting. He shouts every other sentence, as if Shakespeare's language, with its subtleties and hard clarities, were not enough to get the meaning across. Continually drawing attention to himself, Hoffman undermines Iago and the other characters. William Hazlitt described Iago as "an amateur of tragedy in real life," but the true force of this character comes from what his treachery says about us, the audience: Whom haven't we betrayed—in love or in business—to advance a cause we feel insecure about anyway? Instead of working to make us ask ourselves this, Hoffman works to make us see how hard he works. He takes up as much space as a white man can, if you let him. ♦

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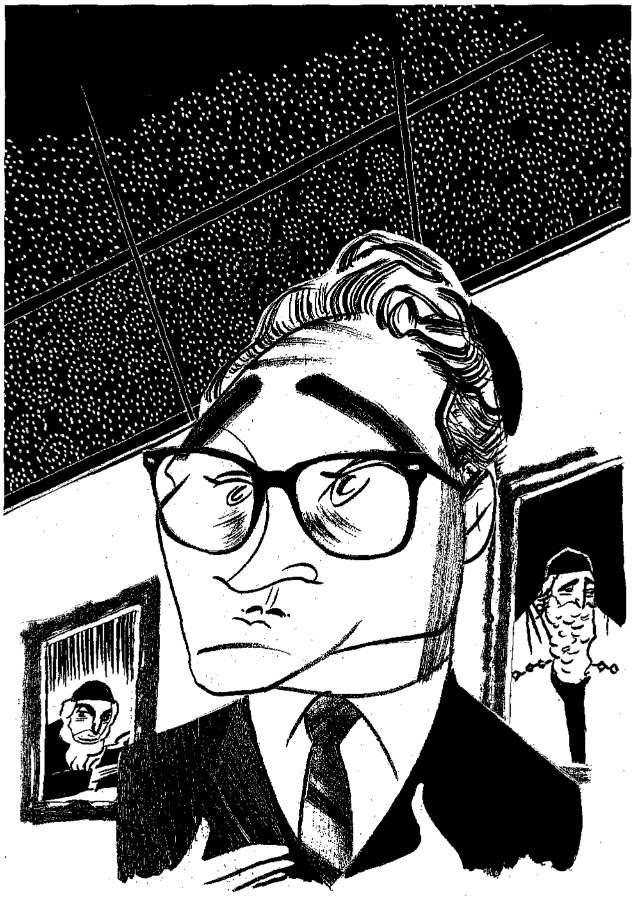
THE CURRENT CINEMA

GODS AND VICTIMS

"A Serious Man" and "Capitalism: A Love Story."

BY DAVID DENBY

At the conclusion of their new movie, "A Serious Man," the Coen brothers pull off a neat little joke. The picture is devoted to the travails of an unhappy Midwestern Jewish family—a real menagerie—in the sixties, and, in the end titles, the Coens have inserted, after the names of hardworking laboratories, the words "No Jews were harmed in the making of this motion picture." Very good; first rate, in fact. But I'm not sure it's true. I know of at least two Jews who were harmed—Ethan and Joel Coen. "A Serious Man," like "Burn After Reading," is in their bleak, black, belittling mode, and it's hell to sit through. The movie is a deadpan farce with a schlemiel Job as a hero—Professor Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg), a physicist at a local university, whose life, in 1967, is falling apart. Gopnik's wife (Sari Lennick) is leaving him for a sanctimonious bastard (Fred Melamed) who covers his aggressions against Larry with limp-pawed caresses and offers of "understanding." Larry's kids are thieving brats, and his hapless, sick, whining brother (Richard Kind) camps on the living-room couch and refuses to look for work. There's more, much more, a series of mishaps, sordid betrayals, and weird coincidences, but Larry, a sweet guy and "a serious man"—upright, a good teacher, a father—won't hit back. Occasionally, his eyebrows fluttering like street signs in a hurricane, he stands up for himself, but he won't take a shot at anyone, or try to control anyone, verbally or any other way. He won't even sleep with the dragon-eyed but sexy and highly available woman next door who sunbathes naked.



Michael Stuhlbarg plays a Job figure in the Coens' new movie.

TOM BACHTELL

The Coens begin mysteriously, with what feels like a Yiddish folktale. Long ago, in a shtetl somewhere in Eastern Europe, an elderly man, supposedly dead, wanders into the house of a married couple. The wife is sure that he's a dybbuk—a spirit possessing a human's body—and she sticks a knife in his chest. The troubles surrounding Larry Gopnik in suburban Minnesota many generations later can only be seen as the revenge of "Hashem"—the word that Conservative Jews in this Midwestern community use to name God. (If that Old Country dybbuk was not God himself, he must have been in God's employ.) One model for the tale is obvious: acting on his wager with Satan, God drives Job to despair. Yet Job, risking his life, questions his tormentor, and Larry does not. The Coens created him that way; they explicitly celebrate "simplicity" and resignation. But a schlep and a weeper is a hero impossible to stay interested in.

The Coens themselves grew up in a suburban area outside Minneapolis. Like Larry's pot-smoking son, Danny (Aaron Wolff), they were kids in the sixties, when rock and roll and drugs kicked holes in the conformist patterns of American middle-class life. They may be remembering that repressive time and its breakup—assuaging old hurts, settling old scores. Bored to death as a Hebrew teacher drones on, Danny, transistor radio plugged into his ear, listens to Grace Slick raising the roof in "Somebody to Love," which certainly feels like a primal memory of entrapment and liberation. That song, plus dope and "F Troop" on TV, is all that keeps Danny going.

He and his family live on a featureless, sun-bleached suburban street where each house is fronted by a boxy patch of grass. It's the suburban nightmare that keeps showing up in ambitious American movies as the banality of evil itself. The low ceilings, the schlocky décor are meant to be of a piece with the endless family bickering and emotional blackmail—satirically enhanced signs of mediocre, soul-punishing middle-class taste, Jewish division. As always, the Coens shape their visual scheme into mocking juxtapositions: sudden, startling shifts of perspective; intrusive closeups of ears and mouths; scenes that end abruptly, with cuts arriving like a guillotine's blade. The brilliant cinematographer Roger Deakins uses superhard focus and solid colors, and when Larry, perched on his roof, tries to straighten out the TV aerial, he looks like a forlorn figure in a nineties hyperrealist painting. Instead of paintings meant to look like photographs, the Coens give us photographs that look like paintings, and there's a touch of the uncanny in the hard-edged look, as if Hashem had isolated and withered Larry with his gaze. As a piece of moviemaking craft, "A Serious Man" is fascinating; in every other way, it's intolerable.

What happens in Minnesota has none of the warmth and expansiveness of a folktale, either traditional or modern. (Isaac

Bashevis Singer would have been disgusted by the hero's backing away from the babe next door.) The Coens' humor is distant, dry, and shrivelling, and they make the people in "A Serious Man" so drably unappealing that you begin to wonder what kind of disgust the brothers are working off. Whatever indignities the Coens suffered as teens, they have hardly been hampered by those memories as adults. Philip Roth's collection of stories "Goodbye, Columbus," which tore into the timidity and prohibitions of middle-class American Jewish life, came out in 1959, when Ethan Coen was two and Joel five. The Coens' laughter is not exactly fresh. Dozens of popular comics in the past half century have worked in the same satiric vein.

Larry applies to a series of local rabbis for help, and the rabbis, vain of their wisdom, either miss the point of his troubles or tell elaborate parables that illuminate nothing; they have no idea why Hashem is pursuing this man. And who is Hashem, anyway? I suppose one might say that all filmmakers, distributing rewards and punishments, come close to playing God. Surely the arbitrary and ruthless Coens are the only deity in sight. Larry Gopnik may teach the uncertainty principle in his class, but his own fate is sealed in advance, and we're not surprised when, at the end, the apocalypse arrives in a dark whirl. Judging from "A Serious Man," one can only say, without blasphemy, that the cinematic Hashem is a malevolent son of a bitch.

There's a good documentary kicking around at the moment that connects the arrogant behavior of bankers in New York to the loss of homes and the destruction of neighborhoods during the economic meltdown—Andrew and Leslie Cockburn's "American Casino." Michael Moore's "Capitalism: A Love Story" is something else—not a good movie or a coherent exposition of the meltdown but an emotional attack on capitalism as a system, an attempt, literally, to de-moralize capitalism. Moore wants to end the notion that capitalism is *good*—benevolent, creative-destructive, the Lord's work, or anything else positive that has ever been claimed for it. Capitalism, in this rendering, lays waste to everything; it's a power structure that allows the rich to steal from the poor. There is much talk of "the rich" and their bad behavior. Some of the taunts may be justified, but, improbably, Moore has rich people and their bought-and-paid-for agents in Congress consciously planning every turn in the economy as a series of heists (Alan Greenspan's recommending home-equity loans was the beginning of a scheme, it turns out, to get people "out of their houses"). If that's the case, Moore might have offered some explanation of how "the rich," as well as millions of others, lost thirty per cent or more of their equity in the stock-market collapse of 2008. Undeterred, he ridicules sordid practices—for instance, a privately run juvenile detention center where kids committing minor offenses are put away for months, increasing profitability. He uses old films, like Zeffirelli's "Jesus of Nazareth," for sarcastic fun: Jesus, dubbed, recommends not care for the poor but deregulating the banking industry as the way to salvation.

"Capitalism" gathers emotional force when Moore moves close to the victims. He uses a home video shot inside a foreclosed house that squatters have refused to leave; the police approach in force and then bash through the kitchen door—a scary moment. He joins the defiant workers at Republic Windows and Doors, in Chicago, who also squatted and won severance pay from a company that wanted to throw them into the street. He's outraged that working Americans could be tossed out of a job or a house, and no one can argue with that anger, or with his grief over the fate of his home town, Flint, Michigan, which was the subject of his first success, "Roger and Me," twenty years ago. Michael Moore has never recovered emotionally from the closing of the G.M. plants in Flint. Once, it seems, there was a paradise, memorialized in home movies: his father worked at the AC Spark Plug plant, the family had plenty to eat and enough money to send the kids to school. In the movie's most touching moment, Moore accompanies his father, now very old, as he stares in horror at the flattened wasteland where the plant once stood. But Moore is so mesmerized by Flint's tragedies that he thinks G.M. went bankrupt because it closed plants in the eighties. Modern capitalism, with its torrential flow of money across borders, is beyond him. By the end of the movie, baffled, he resorts to his old gags: trying to get Henry Paulson, for example, on the phone to hold him accountable; wrapping Goldman Sachs's New York headquarters in yellow crime-scene tape. It's a sad movie—funny, yet wounded and bewildered. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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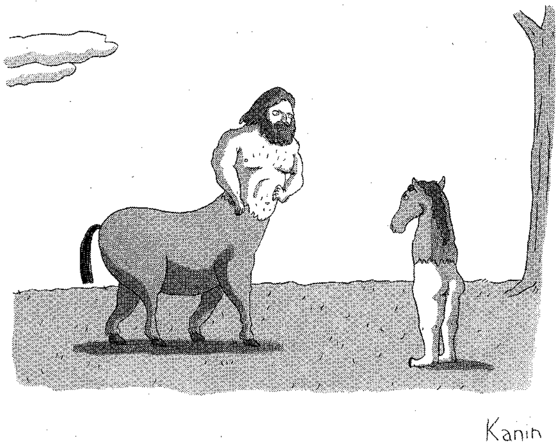
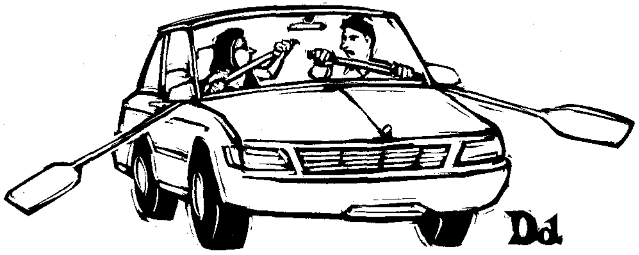
THE WINNING CAPTION



"You're just like your mother."
Hugh Simmons, Brooklyn, N.Y.



THE FINALISTS

"This would work out a lot better if we had kids."
Michael Fossel, Hartford, Conn.

"American car companies just can't make a decent hybrid."
Eric Prestemon, Sunnyvale, Calif.

"You know, everyone laughed at Noah, too."
Rachel Pleasant Chambliss, Lakeland, Fla.

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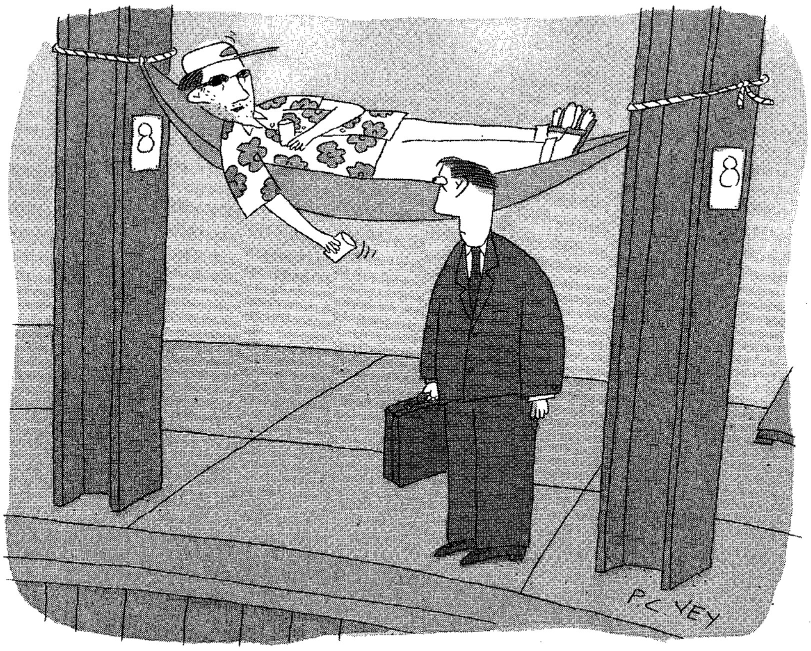

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